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University Of Nottingham

How Do Young Adults Develop  
Preferences Towards Clothing Retail  
Stores?

Asita Kuruppu

Msc Marketing

# How Do Young Adults Develop Preferences Towards Clothing Retail Stores?

By

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2012

A Dissertation presented in part consideration for the  
degree of Master of Marketing

## **Executive Summary**

This dissertation primarily explores how young adults develop preferences towards clothing retail stores. It also aims to identify if a difference exists in preferences between males and females. The Two stores selected for participants to base their preferences on were French Connection and All Saints.

Literature drawn from consumer behaviour which consists of self-concept, symbolic consumption, and store image and reference groups was used for this dissertation.

The results of this study showed that young adults did heighten their preferences for clothing stores as a result of the concepts derived from the literature. An interesting finding was that some young adults attached the same symbolic meanings which they attached to clothes to their favourite clothing stores. Furthermore it was found that young adults prefer stores which are congruent to their ideal and actual self-concepts and they avoided stores which were not consistent to their identities and self-image. Although there was evidence of reference group influence the participants primarily used their own judgement and evaluation towards clothing stores. This could be because the young adults in this study were found to be individualistic and valued creating their own identities rather than conforming to others. The most important component of store image was found to be employees and store atmosphere. The quality of merchandise and price of merchandise was also considered important.

The dissertation concludes with marketing implications for retail stores and managers. The research limitations of the study are also discussed.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## Chapter1 : Introduction

The clothing and fashion industry is an extremely competitive one. In order to succeed in today's environment the retailer must be able to formulate effective marketing strategies. This becomes increasingly difficult in today's consumer society as trends and consumers are evolving at a rapid pace.

An interesting question arises; what is it that draws the shopper to one store rather than another? This question has been a topic of study for many years as early as the 1940's (Bellenger and Koraonkar, 1980). This question is important from a retailer's perspective because its answer provides a basis for building a successful strategy to attract shoppers and generate sales.

Formally when goods tended to mean something essential the functional values of a product as well as the practical matters were regarded as the most important (Levy, 1959). Furthermore the philosophy of business was also oriented around these issues (Levy, 1959). However the market place changed as different variety of products and choices become available to consumers (Levy, 1959). "Products were consumed not for their material utilities but for their symbolic meanings as portrayed in their images (Elliot, 1997, p.286). In other words products were not only bundles of attributes that yielded particular benefits but they were capable of signifying symbolic meanings to consumers (Jamal and Goode, 2001).

As the market place transformed and modern goods were recognised as psychological things (Levy, 1959). Retailers also needed to supplement consumer's appetites for symbolic goods and needed to become more than just places where things were bought. Store image became a critical component of store choice and store loyalty (Thompson and Chen, 1998). Store image can be defined as *"the way in which the store is defined in the shoppers mind partly by its functional qualities and psychological attributes"* (Martineau, 1959, p.47).

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore how young adults develop preferences towards clothing retail stores. The study will explore the functional and psychological elements of store preference however more importance will be placed on the psychological factors.

The psychological factors explored in this study will be symbolic consumption, self-concept, and reference groups whilst the functional elements will involve identifying the most important attributes or components of store image (price, quality, atmosphere perceived) (Berry, 1974). This dissertation also aims to examine if a difference exists among male and female young adult shoppers in their preferences for clothing stores. The main reason for this is because a majority of clothing stores are segmented by gender. Clothing stores were selected, as clothes are goods which are very symbolic in nature, they are closely bound to an individual's self-concept and are used as a way of judging people (Piacentini and Mailer, 2004).

There are many reasons for choosing this area as a dissertation topic. First being that there hasn't been any relevant academic literature which has explored store image preferences for clothing stores and hence exploring new areas of research can open closed doors by way of bringing important implications for academics, marketers and managers. Secondly from a consumer behaviour perspective understanding how young adults develop preferences for clothing stores can add to the existing knowledge of store image literature. And finally consumer behaviour and more specifically self-concept is an interesting area of research for the author.

This dissertation is structured into five chapters. Chapter one provides an overall introduction to the study and highlights the background and aims. Chapter two offers a review of the literature that will be used for this study. Chapter three discusses and justifies the methodology chosen for this dissertation. The chapter also discusses the research procedure, interview questions and the pilot study used. Chapter four reveals the findings of the study after the analysis of the transcribed interviews. The final chapter consists of the conclusion, implications and limitations of the study.



## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction to literature review**

The following chapter reviews the literature relevant to this topic. This chapter will be organised into several sections as follows.

The first part of the literature review will focus on symbolic consumption. The second section will review literature relevant to consumer's self-concept. Also the different dimensions of self-concept will be discussed. Furthermore aspects concerning self-image congruity, store image, store image congruity, self-esteem and self-consistency will be included in this section. The third section will review literature on the three types of reference groups which are informational, value expressive and utilitarian reference group influence. This will be followed by literature concerning the research sample of this study. Differences between male and female young adults will also be briefly reviewed. The final section will identify gaps found in the literature in order to justify the research questions of this study.

### **2.2 Symbolic Consumption**

An important principle in consumer behaviour is understands how consumers attach meanings in their consumption activities .Goods can signify meaning to consumers in two ways. One perspective according to McCracken (1986) is when marketers create a symbolic meaning for a product and inject it to a culturally oriented world. This perspective assumes that consumers accept products and brands that suit their self-identity (Ligas and Cotte, 1999). Another perspective is when consumers themselves adapt meanings to goods which fit their own lifestyles (Holt, 1997; Mich and Buhl, 1992).Grub and Grathwohl (1967, p.24) define symbolic goods as “things which stand for or express something else”. However Solomon (1983) while acknowledging that products do possess symbolic meanings for consumers states that consumers look to the total collection of cues in the environment to decode the true symbolic meaning within the good.

It is generally accepted by marketers and consumer researchers that individuals consume products and brands for their symbolic properties as much for its functional benefits (Piacentini and Mailer, 2004). This principle was originally proposed by Gofman (1951). However the most frequently cited phrase on symbolic consumption in marketing literature was posed by Levy (1959, p.118) who stated that “people buy things not only for what they

can do, but for also what they mean". Levy's (1959) main intention was to signal that diversity in spending was taking place from a consumer being functionally oriented to becoming symbolically oriented.

Wattanasuwan (2005) states that all voluntary consumption activities carries some symbolic meaning either consciously or unconsciously, he goes on to state that if consumers have a choice they will always consume things which hold some symbolic meaning. Similarly Levy (1959) states that symbolic objects are more harmonious with ones goals, feelings and self-identities than non-symbolic objects hence the choice between the two becomes easier.

Individuals engage in symbolic consumption for many reasons. Elliot and Wattanasuwan (1988) state that individuals use symbolic goods to create foster and develop their identities. Similarly Dittmar (1992) comments that symbolic goods have a profound significance for their owners and that the symbolic meaning of their possessions are an integral feature in expressing their identities. Other studies have shown that possessions are viewed as major parts of ones extended self (Belk, 1988). Furthermore a considerable body of literature suggests that consumers strive to construct their self-concept through symbolic consumption (Dittmar, 1992; McCracken, 1988).

## **2.3 Self-concept**

### **2.3.1 Self Concept in consumer behaviour**

Self-concept is an important construct in consumer behaviour. Self-concept literature in consumer research has increased significantly in the past thirty years (Heath and Scott, 1998). The knowledge self-concept has contributed to marketing research and marketing theory has helped marketers to understand the way consumers make choices in the context of symbolic meaning attached to various products and services (Onkvisit and Shaw, 1987)

Many scholars seem to define self-concept as "the totality of the individuals thoughts and *feelings having reference to himself as an object*" (Sirgy,1982, pp.284). However self-concept has been treated from various points of view for example psychoanalytic theory views the self-concept as a self-system inflicted with conflict and behavioural theory construes the self as a bundle of conditioned responses (Sirgy, 1982). Zinkham and Hong, (1991) state that the self-concept is a cognitive structure which is associated with strong feelings or behaviours on this basis they argue that self-concept is the knowledge of one's self which includes the driving thrust of others behaviours. Similarly Grubb and Grawthol (1967) define self-concept as ones attitudes beliefs, feelings and perceptions they also go on

to state that one's self-concept is formed in an interaction process with parents, peers, teachers and significant others. Sheth et al (1991) state that buy versus no buy decisions are influenced by social values in that consumers perceive various product classes as either congruent or incongruent with the norms of the referent groups to which they belong to aspire. Finally Schousten (1991, pp. 413) states that an individual's self-concept comprises a variety of things which include personal attributes, fantasies, role identities, relationships and possessions that individuals use for the purpose of self-creation.

Studies on self-concept offer a significant perspective on the understanding of consumer decision making. It has been proved that consumers may decide not to or have little influence to buy a product or to shop at a particular store if they feel that these actions are not consistent or does not tie in closely with their own perceptions of self-image irrespective of its potential symbolic value. (Zinkham and Hong, 1991). In other words scholars established that individuals would express themselves by choosing brands whose personalities were perceived to be congruent with their own personalities (Aaker, 1999, Sirgy, 1982, Jamaal and Goode, 2001).

Self-concept research originated in the 1960's and in these early studies the self-concept operationalization was a one dimensional construct (Birdwell, 1968; Grubb and Grathwohl, 1967). The assumption was that a person has a stable set of personality traits and he or she would behave in a similar way across different context (Aaker, 1999, Sirgy, 1982). However this assumption was later challenged by scholars stating that individuals are expected to have multiple selves in which they act differently in different situations with different individuals (Markus and Nurius. 1986). The marketing literature identifies four dimensions of self-concept to explain and predict behaviour. Actual self is how an individual in fact sees himself, Ideal self is how an individual would like to see himself social self is how an individual feels others see himself/herself and ideal social self is how an individual would like others to see himself/herself (Jamal and Goode, 2001).

There has been much debate about which dimension of self-concept to integrate into consumer behaviour studies. Landon (1974) argues that the relationship between the different forms of self-concept and product preference may change according to different product categories. For example congruence between the actual self-concept and product concept may not be significant because often consumers do not want to describe their true selves but they choose to superimpose their ideal self-concepts (Ekinici and Riley, 2003, p.202). Moreover

Malhotra (1988) supports the idea of different roles for actual, ideal and social self-concept and his study suggests that ideal rather than actual self-concept is the primary influence on house preference. Therefore for these reason this dissertation will incorporate both actual and ideal self-concepts.

### **2.3.2 Self Esteem**

Self-esteem is the motive to seek experiences that enhance or protect the self-concept (Hogg and Banister, 2000, p. 852). The pursuit of self-esteem is recognised by marketing managers as one of the most important motivational drivers in decision making (Banister and Hogg, 2003). People are generally motivated to maintain high levels of self-esteem when it comes under threat (Pyszynski et al, 2004). On the contrary people with low self-esteem do not expect that they will perform very well also they will try to avoid embarrassment failure or rejection (Solomon et al, 2010). Self-esteem can also be defined as the motive to seek experiences that enhance or protect the self-concept (Banister and Hogg, 2003). People with high self-esteem expect to be successful, will take more risk and are willing to be the centre of attention (Solomon et al, 2010).

People are heavily influenced by the need to maintain and enhance self-esteem. Attitudes play an important role in maintaining and protecting self-esteem encouraging consumers to distance themselves from disliked products and brands (Shariff, 1989). Furthermore attribution research shows that people are more likely to attribute positive outcomes to aspects of self and negative outcomes to circumstances unrelated to selves (Miller and Ross, 1975).

Social interaction is another important aspect of self-esteem (Escalas and Bettmann, 2003). Schlenker (1980) says that people manage their perception of self in various situations to maximise positive feedback. Furthermore it's said that people strive to make a good impression when they have high self-esteem (Escalas and Bettman, 2003).

In the context of this study individuals with high self-esteem can be expected to care more about their appearance than others therefor identifying if self-esteem plays a part in consumers preferences towards a retail store will be an interesting avenue to this dissertation.

### **2.3.3 Self-consistency**

Self-consistency is the motive an individual would have to behave consistently with the views one has of his or her self (Banister and Hogg, 2003). This would occur when an individual seeks and interprets situations and adapts behaviour strategies that are consistent with their existing self-concepts (Escalas and Bettman, 2003). Studies have found that consumers choose products and brands by imagining the prototypical user for each item in the choice set and choosing the item that maximises their similarity to a desired prototypical user (Escalas and Bettman, 2003).

Therefore it will be interesting in this dissertation to explore if consumers have a self-consistency motive in developing their preferences towards clothing retail stores.

### **2.3.4 Self-image Congruity**

Self-image congruity is when consumers strive to buy products which are similar to their self-concept (Graeff, 1996). Previous studies have shown that consumers attempt to maintain or enhance their self-concept through the purchase of goods and services.

The bulk of the research on self-image congruity is on explaining product preferences and intention to purchase (Erickson, 1996; Mehta, 1999; Malhotra, 1987). Self-image congruity facilitates positive behaviour and attitudes towards products and intention to recommend (Erickson, 1996; Sirgy, 1982; Litvin and Kar, 2003). The congruence between self-image and product image is also positively related to product evaluations, (Graeff, 1996) choice (Quester et al. 2000) and satisfaction (Jamaal and Almarri, 2007; Ekinici, 2003). Research on brand relationship quality has shown that self-congruity contributes towards increased loyalty (Fournier, 1998). The emphasis in this dissertation would focus on, store preference and satisfaction.

Nevertheless taking this into consideration the close relationship self-congruity has with consumer behaviour there are some criticisms associated with some of the findings in previous research. Firstly self-image congruity may not be found in all product categories as people would have no intent to communicate with the environment by encoding messages about self and others through consumption, as not all goods have symbolic value (Belk et al, 1982). However products that are more conspicuous in nature are better suited towards self-image congruity (Zinkham and Hong, 1991; Mehta, 1999) for example Graeff (1996) found that consumer's evaluation of publicly consumed brands were more in tune with their ideal

selves than actual self-concepts. Furthermore Malhotra (1988) criticises self-congruity research stating the inadequate conceptualisation of self-concept, a poor measurement instrument, weak methodology and the effect of using incorrect personality variables responsible for negative results found in self-congruity studies.

The self-image congruity theory has been tested across many product and service categories. A majority of the studies have been on automobiles (Birdwell, 1968 ; Hong and Zinkham, 1995 , Erickson, 1996). Apart from automobiles it has been tested on other products such as shoes, clothing, beer, cameras and jewellery. Studies testing this construct on services have been comparatively less with research primarily being focused on hospitality services, (Back, 2005; Ekinici and Riley, 2003) tourism (Chon, 1992 ; Litvin and Kar, 2003 ) and financial services.

### **2.3.5 Self-concept in retailing and store image**

Self-image congruity research in retailing has been quite limited (Sirgy et al, 2000). Bellenger and Steingerg (1976) state that to succeed retailers must have an understanding of why shoppers select one store over another. An important tool in consumer behaviour which can assist retailers to know this is by assessing if consumers are patronising retail stores which possess images which are congruent with the images they have of themselves. This is known as store image congruence. In simple terms this is a matching process between a consumer's self-image and the store image. As stated previously in this literature review self-image is defined as the mental description one has of him or herself. Most of the widely cited definitions of store image are based on consumer's perceptions of many store characteristics (Zimmer and Golden, 1988). The first definition was proposed by Martineau (1958) where he described store image as the way in which the store is defined in the shoppers mind partly by its functional qualities and partly by an aura of psychological attributes. Oxenfeldt (1974) later described image as an overall impression greater than the sum of its parts he goes on to state that it represents interaction among characteristics and includes extraneous elements. Furthermore Berry (1969) states that a consumer develops an image of a store on the basis of the totality of his experiences shopping there and the overall form that this image will take depends on the respective value he or she places on the various components of image; similarly Dichter (1985) describes image as the total impressions an entity makes on the minds of others.

The above definitions on image would suggest that it is quite subjective and that consumers would perceive different elements of the store as attractive and not attractive (Martineau, 1958). Likewise Zimmer and Golden (1988) state that identifying a store's particular image can be quite problematic for two reasons being conceptualization and measurement.

The general consensus has been to divide store image into two sets of attributes functional and psychological (Martineau, 1957; Sirgy, 2000; Chen and Mukherjee, 2007). Psychological attributes could range from the atmosphere, experience, feelings created within the store, conspicuousness of the store, level of service according to one's expectations, attitude towards the store, status of the store and the impressions formed of the typical store patron (Martineau, 1957; Sirgy, 2000). Previous studies exploring store image have revealed that the psychological factors have a greater influence on consumers compared to the functional or demographic factors of store image (Martineau, 1957; Zimmer and Golden, 1988). For example Martineau (1959, p. 48) in his study states that "A shopper seeks the store whose *image is most congruent with the image she has of herself*". Martineau (1959) goes on to state that some stores may intimidate a shopper whilst others may seem beneath a shopper and the subjective elements of a store such as the atmosphere, status and personnel consciously or unconsciously directs a shopper's behaviour. However Martineau (1959) does state that economic factors such as the price are important but unless the store image is acceptable price announcements are meaningless.

The functional aspects of the store image are price of merchandise, quality of merchandise, assortment of merchandise, location convenience and sales promotion in other words the functional attributes directly relate to the four P's of marketing (Sirgy et al, 2000; Berry, 1969).

For this dissertation the psychological or symbolic aspects of store image will be explored more closely.

previous studies measuring store image have had positive results for example Berry (1969) used open ended questions to determine consumer impressions of three department stores and he concluded that department stores have meaningful image differences. A study conducted by Myers (1960) showed that 75 per cent of the respondents had image impressions of the department stores in which they shop. Also Weale (1961) in her study compared the images of her research subjects to those that the management of the store tried to tailor.

### **2.3.6 Retail Self-image congruity**

In the retail context Sirgy et al (1989) define actual self-image congruity as the degree of match between a shopper's actual self-image and a store image and the ideal self-image congruity is the degree of match between shopper's ideal image and store image. A similar approach will be undertaken in this dissertation.

According to previous studies store image is crucial for retail success furthermore self-congruity theory suggests that store image should be managed to match the store images with the self-concept of shoppers (He and Mukherjee, 2007). Past studies investigating self-congruity with store image have reported that store image has a direct bearing on retail patronage and loyalty (Hirschman, 1981; Sirgy and Samli, 1985). For example a study conducted by Stern et al (1974) in a department store context found that consumers were loyal to stores where characteristics are congruent with their actual self-images compared to their ideal self-images. In another study Lessig (1973) showed that consumer's loyalty may be characterised as being more of an avoidance of certain stores rather than an attraction to a particular store.

Research on store image is well documented however a majority of the research have focused on the functional attributes of a store in addition research on store image and self-congruity is relatively low. Moreover research on store image self-congruity has focused on one type of self-concept (actual self) even though multiple types of self-concept have been recognised. Also the context of these studies has been based on department stores, grocery stores, super markets and discount stores. This theory has not been tested on clothing stores. Furthermore most of the store image literatures have featured women in their sample.

### **2.4 Reference groups**

An important determinant of an individual's behaviour is others influence (Bearden, et al, 1989). Social and group influences from parent, colleagues, leisure activity enthusiast and cultural figures would have an impact on the consumption decisions made by young adults. The fact that people act in accordance with a frame of reference produced by the group which they belong is a long accepted and sound premise (Bearden and Ertel, 1982). Escalas and Bettman (2003) state that consumers use others as a source of information for arriving at and evaluating their beliefs about the world. This assessment of opinion and abilities uses relevant others who share beliefs and are similar on relevant dimensions (Escalas and Bettman, 2003).



According to Bearden and Etzel (1982) a reference group can be defined as a person or group of people that significantly influences an individual's behaviour" (Bearden and Etzel, 1982).

Reference group influence can take several forms. Influence can be categorised as informational, value expressive and utilitarian (Bearden and Etzel. 1982 ; Bearden et al, 1989).

Informational influence is when an influence is accepted and is perceived to enhance the individual's knowledge regarding his environment and his ability to cope with some aspects of the environment without uncertainty however the information source has to be perceived as being credible (Park and Lessig, 1977). An example of this influence is when an individual seeks information about various clothing stores from a well renowned fashion magazine. According to previous research the credibility of the source plays a significant role in determining conformity (Park and Lessig, 1977). Informational influence may occur in two ways. Firstly Individuals may either search for information from knowledgeable others or secondly they may make inferences based upon the observation of the behaviour of others (Park and Lessig, 1977). Informational influence has been found to affect consumer decision processes regarding product evaluations for example Burnkrant and Cousineau, (1975) in their study identified that informational social influence is dominant when buying motives were cognitive regardless of the conspicuousness associated to the product. Informational influence also plays a role during product/ brand selection with the main objective of forming associations and to gain knowledge about a purchase (Bearden and Etzel, 1982).

The utilitarian and value expressive reference group influences fall under what is known as normative influence. Normative influence can be defined as the tendency to conform to the expectations of another person, group or oneself (Burnkrant and Cousineau, 1975). Early research on reference group in relation to marketing was primarily focused on the normative influence (Burnkrant and Cousineau, 1975). For example Venkatesan (1966) studied subject's choice of best suits and came to the conclusion that a strong normative effect determined subject's evaluation. Similarly a study conducted by Stafford (1966) reported group members tend to conform to the group leader in brand selection.

The nature of normative social influence may differ according to whether compliance with group norms is voluntary or involuntary (Burnkrant and Cousineau, 1975). When an individual involuntarily attempts to comply with the wishes of others to achieve rewards or punishment this is known as utilitarian reference group influence (Bearden and Etzel, 1982).

If an individual feels that certain types of behaviour will result in rewards or punishments from others and these outcomes are viewed as important he will find it useful to meet the expectations of these significant others. An example of this in consumer behaviour context would be if an individual's decision to purchase from a particular store is influenced by the preferences of people with whom they have social interactions with, the individual will be under pressure to conform to the group and hence would have to purchase from that particular store.

A value expressive referent group influence is when an individual's motive is to enhance or support his self-concept (Park and Lessig, 1977). This type of influence will motivate individuals to express themselves and they may participate for two reasons. Firstly to express or bolster ones ego consistently with the image attached with the referent group and secondly because one would develop an attachment or liking for the group and the individual will respond out of a feeling for it not because of a desire to be associated with it (Bearden and Etzel, 1982). An example of this would be if an individual feels that by going to a particular store will help enhance the image others have of him.

In order for the forms of influence to occur it requires social interaction and public scrutiny of behaviour (Bearden et al, 1989). This also implies that the products should be conspicuous, observable and subject to the opinions of others (Bearden et al, 1989; Park and Lessig, 1977; Burnkrant and Cousineau, 1975). Normative influence is expected to be most influential under conditions of high visibility and conspicuous products (Burnkrant and Cousineau, 1975).

The majority of research on reference groups has focused on the role of membership reference groups and aspirational reference groups in influencing consumer preference. For example Witt and Bruce (1972) identified that a relationship exists between group influence and brand choice congruence similar to Stafford (1966) who also found individuals brand choice to be affected by group influence. Berger and Heath (2007) show that consumers diverge from those of others to ensure that they effectively communicate desired identities. Escalas and Bettman (2005) take this argument further by stating that consumers report higher brand meanings towards brands with images that are consistent with images of an in-group compared to brands with images that are inconsistent with the image of an in-group.

Research on reference group influence on young adults have shown that young people may be more susceptible to reference group influence since they would be expected to have

limited capacity to cope with uncertainty and risk compared to adults also the frequency in informal interaction with social contact which is at a high level will influence young adults more towards reference groups (Park and Lessig, 1977).

Research investigating store choice and reference group influence has not been studied before. However there is some research examining clothing with relation to reference groups (Bearden and Etzel, 1982). In their paper Bearden and Etzel (1982) state that clothing can be classified as a public necessity in which reference group influence is weak as virtually everyone owns it however reference group influence on the brand is strong because it will be seen by others.

## **2.5 Young Adults and Gender differences.**

### **2.5.1 Young Adults**

Since the research sample for this study will consist of young adults and also because the findings will be compared between gender. An overview of previous works in consumer behaviour on these two demographic factors will be looked at.

According to Shim (1966) age is positively related to price consciousness, value for money, habitual purchases and brand loyalty. In this study the focus will be on young adults. Young adults play an important part in the market place as they exert enormous influence over the allocation of spending power across a growing number of product categories especially fashion products (Hogg, 1998).

When consumers enter new phases of their lives or take on new roles they feel insecure and uncertain about how to behave (Fisher and Gainer, 1993). The period of transition from childhood to adult hood is a major shift for any individual and this period could result in an identity crisis (Piacentini and Mailer, 2004). During this period people are not aware of who they want to become they begin to assimilate a new status and make appropriate role adaptations, this period is known as the period of disequilibrium (Piacentini and Mailer, 2004). Consumers in role transition rely heavily on the symbolic properties of goods to assist them make choices and create their self-concept (Leigh and Gable, 1992). Piacentini and Mailer (2004) state that ambiguity and uncertainty which consumers have in this stage of their lives leads to symbolic buying behaviour. Belk (1982) states that consumer's reliance on symbolic images recedes with age as consumers become more comfortable with their self-concept and identity.

Furthermore social life among young adults is very active hence the importance of social identity and social interaction becomes important for young adults (Myers, 1999). Piacentini and Mailer (2004) have shown that symbolic consumption among young consumers is used in order to locate them within society. This continuous socialisation process causes young adults to form an ego, expressing them to an outside world and testing their acceptability to others (Park and Lessig, 1977). Doing these things involves trial and error learning of ego expression and self-realisation both of which are part of the socialisation process (Park and Lessig, 1977). Studies also show that peers are a dominant influence on young adults compared to parents and family as a consequence of the social and group environment (Scott, 1974).

### **2.5.2 Gender Differences**

An assumption present in much consumer research and marketing strategy is that men and women differ in aspects of their consumer behaviour ranging from the products they tend to buy, their responses to advertising, product positioning and how they attach meanings to products (Fisher and Arnold, 1994, pp. 165). Furthermore sexual identities is a very important component of a consumer's self-concept as people act, dress and speak according to the expectations others have of their gender (Yorberg, 1974).

It seems that males are controlled by argentic goals which stress self-assertion and mastery on the other hand females are believed to have communal goals such as affiliation and the fostering of harmonious relations (Mayers-Levy, 1988). Males are more price conscious and have greater price related skills whereas females consider novelty and fashion to be of greater importance (Moschis and Moore, 1978 ; Shim, 1996).

Studies have shown that Females are more susceptible to reference group influence than males (Mayers-Levy and Sternthal. 1991). Aunty and Elliot (2001) in their study state that women are more easily influenced than men in situations where other group members exert pressure on women to change their minds (Aunty and Elliot, 2001, pp.236). Other studies have shown that men tend to buy instrumental and leisure items impulsively projecting independence and activity while women tend to buy symbolic and self-expressive goods concerned with appearance and emotional aspects of self (Moschis and Moore, 1978)

However Kacen (2000) suggests that in the post-modern era the ascendance of a culture of consumption has destroyed masculine feminine differences by making everyone a consumer.

Bourdieu (1984) states that the main distinction in the postmodern era is through symbolic differentiation which underlies the cultural system and that consumption plays a central role in the construction of identities rather than gender. Furthermore Venkatesh and Firat (1993) state that the old male, female mind ,body, producer ,consumer distinctions are gone.

However it still appears there is a distinction in the context of a clothing store where gender is concerned as most stores are primarily segmented based on gender. Furthermore past studies investigating store image have not included males in their study. Hence investigating the differences between males and females will be interesting and of value for this dissertation.

## **2.6 Research purpose and Questions**

As mentioned before this research aims to identify how young adults develop preferences towards clothing retail stores. This is also the primary research question in this study.

There has been much academic research in the area of store image and consumer satisfaction. Store image has frequently been defined as an attitude or set of attributes and its measurement always involves the identification of a number of attributes assumed to collectively make up a stores image (Thompson and Chen, 1998). This study would also explore the attributes of a store which are most important to the research sample. However it would differ from previous research as it aims to gain in depth insights about these attributes, their symbolic meaning and how they might relate to a consumers self-concept rather than just identify and list them. The author believes that this is important as certain attributes in a store, for example store atmosphere is quite subjective and a more in-depth explanation as to why a customer likes or dislikes it can help retail managers more.

Previous research exploring the role played by psychological factors in forming store image has mainly been focused on self-image (Martineau, 1957, Sirgy et al, 1989). Again a majority of this type of research have been conducted using quantitative research and semantic differential scales. This study will further the investigation of the psychological factors that underpin preferences of store image by including reference group influence which has not been included together with store image research previously.

Another gap identified in the literature was that a majority of previous research included only female participants in its sample. Therefore the author believed that including males into this

study would provide useful insights to marketers and academics since clothing stores are segmented according to gender.

Therefore to summarise, the research question to be addressed by this dissertation is:

- **“Identify how young adults develop preferences towards clothing retail stores?”**
- **“Is there a difference between male and female shoppers in their preferences for clothing stores?”**

## **Chapter 3: Research methodology**

### **3.1 What is research?**

Research can be defined as a systematic and focused enquiry that goes beyond generally available knowledge to acquire specialised detailed information which provides a basis for analysis and elucidatory comment on the topic of enquiry (Johnson, 1994).

Even though research is academic in nature it seeks to add to existing theory, business research and provides implications for management (Easterby-Smith et al, 1991)

### **3.2 What is methodology?**

“The term methodology refers to the way in which we approach problems and seek answers” (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998, p.3). In the social sciences, the term applies to how research is conducted (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998, p.3). Taylor and Bogdan (1998) state that the assumptions, interests, and purposes of the research determines which methodology is chosen by the author.

#### **3.2.2 Research Philosophy**

There are two philosophies which have dominated social science (Silverman, 2010). They are positivism and interpretivism (Silverman, 2010). The positivist seeks only facts or legitimate sources of data, this is said to be the only way through which reality is experienced (Thorpe and Holt, 2008). The interpretivist or phenomenologist is dedicated to understanding social phenomena from the subjects own perspective to determine how the world is experienced (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998). The most important data or sources of information for interpretivist is understanding the internal ideas, feelings and motives of the research subject (1970). Furthermore Webber (1968) states that interpretivist strive to understand on a personal level the motives and beliefs behind peoples actions.

### **3.2.3 Qualitative versus Quantitative Research.**

Since positivists and interpretivist seek different answers and have different objectives in their research different methodologies are used for their research (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998). The methods used in positivist research are questionnaires, inventories and demography that produce data amenable to statistical analysis. (Bryman and Bell, 2011) These types of data can also be referred to as quantitative research. The methods used in interpretivist research are participant observation, in depth interviewing and others that yield descriptive data also classified as qualitative research (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998).

Research can also be conducted using both quantitative and qualitative methods although some authors have regarded the two as being of “complete contrast”. However there are many examples of studies that have used both methods (Bryman and Bell, 2011,p.26).

In the field of social sciences especially marketing quantitative methods have dominated research (Bryman and Bell, 2011). However this trend is progressively changing as many authors and managers alike have recognised the value and insights that qualitative research provides (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

### **3.2.4 Justification for Research Method**

This study intends to explore the factors which influence young consumers to develop preferences to clothing retail stores. Higher emphasis on the psychological factors which influence these consumers will be explored. These concepts include self-concept, reference group influence and symbolic consumption which are all complicated socially constructed phenomena and in order to gain a deeper understanding on how these factors influence consumers the author’s choice of research will be qualitative research. The reasons for choosing a qualitative research approach as opposed to a quantitative research approach are discussed below.

The main justification for using this research method in this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the meanings consumers attach to the retail stores as Blummer (1969, p.86) states “qualitative research enables the researcher to empathize and identify with the people *in the study in order to understand how those people see things*”. In contrast quantitative research perceives reality to be objective, simple and fixed furthermore all members of society are said to define reality in the same way (Sarantakos, 2005).



Qualitative research on the other hand focuses on the belief that there is neither objective reality nor objective truth (Bryman, 2012). On the contrary reality is subjective and is experienced internally residing in the minds of the people who construct it (Sarantakos, 2005).

In qualitative research human beings occupy a central position they are not non participants but active creators of their world also the perspectives of all people powerful or powerless are valid and equally important similarly the researcher also has an active role in determining the outcome (Silverman, 2005; Taylor and Bogdan, 1998). Moreover qualitative research is described as being naturalistic as the research is aimed to demonstrate how people act in the course of daily life (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998). Conversely in quantitative research human beings are perceived to be rational individuals obeying external laws without free will in turn this approach is said to lose sight of the human side of social life (Sarantakos, 2005).

Another reason for choosing qualitative research over quantitative research is that responses can be facilitated for more in depth information providing the opportunity to explore deeper into the opinions and insights of the research subject (Bryman, 2012). Tools such as in depth interviews enable researcher's to do this. Contrary to this many of the techniques associated with quantitative research such as social survey research and questionnaires have shown to relate poorly to peoples actual behaviour (Bryman, 2012).

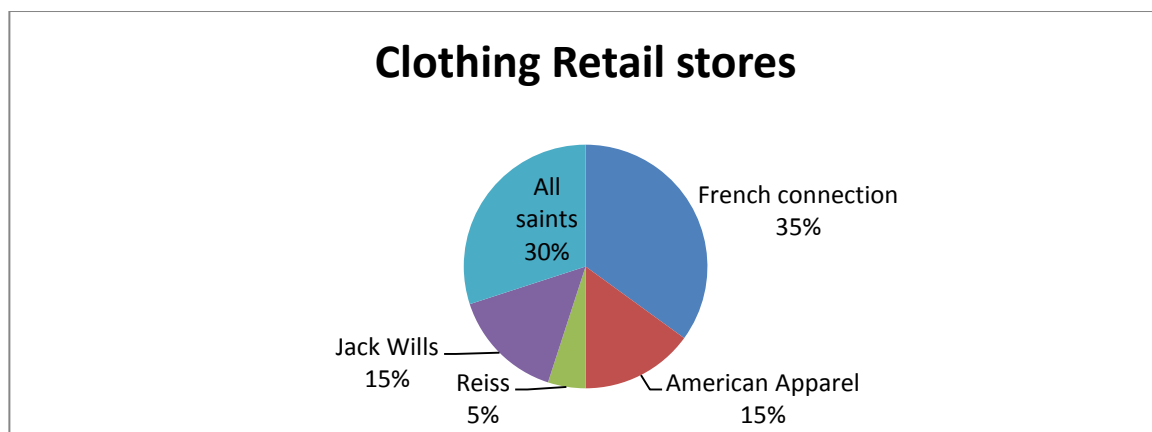
This dissertation will be exploring certain psychological concepts that cause consumers to develop preferences to clothing retail stores. Some of these concepts such as store image and symbolic consumption involve the evocation of subjective sensations within the consumer (Martineau, 1961). Therefore objective research methods may not be appropriate. Furthermore Golden and Zimmer(1988) state that linear and one dimensional thought models used in quantitative research such as hierarchies and list of appeals in order of importance needs to be abandoned in favour of unstructured approaches like in-depth interviews used in quantitative research.

Furthermore constructs like self- concept and reference group influence in the past have been researched through tools such as semantic differential scales (Sirgy, 1982; Bearden, 1988). Therefore this dissertation using techniques such as in-depth interviews will bring a new dimension to existing research. Hence a qualitative research approach will be used in this dissertation to address the research questions.

### 3.3 Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted among twenty participants (10 boys and 10 girls ) to identify their two most preferred clothing stores. The reason behind focusing on only two clothing stores as opposed to selecting multiple stores was in order that the responses given by the research participants will be more generalisable. Furthermore since the majority of the participants in the pilot study would be later involved in the in-depth interviews the pilot study ensured that all the respondents will be more than familiar with at least one of the clothing retail stores later selected for the study. The participants of the pilot study were limited in naming only two high end clothing stores as products purchased from such stores are likely to involve more complex decision making ,products will be conspicuously consumed and also items in these stores will have some symbolic value associated with it compared to lower end clothing retails stores (Leigh and Gabel, 1992).

The author selected five high street clothing retail stores which were Jack Wills, American Apparel, French Connection, All saints and Reiss from which the participants had to select their favourite two stores. The participants were also requested to reveal the reasons for choosing the stores. The results of the study are shown in the pie chart below **(Figure1)**.



(Figure 1)

The two most popular stores among the participants were French Connection and All saints followed by American Apparel, Jack Wills and Reiss.

Out of the male respondent the most popular stores were French connection, (30%) All saints (20%) and American Apparel (20%) (**Appendix 1**). And from the female respondents the most popular stores were French Connection (40%) and All saints (40%) (**Appendix 2**).

It was concluded that French Connection and All saints were the two most popular stores among the participants of the pilot study. Hence the two were chosen for the dissertation.

Out of the seven participants who had chosen French connection five of them said that the store had good quality clothes and friendly staff .Out of the six participants who chose All Saints a majority of them said that all saints have an individual style and atmosphere as the main reasons for selecting the store.

The pilot study also involved the author visiting the chosen stores. The objective of these visits was to develop an image of the store in the author's mind, to understand the general thematic image of the store and to compare this image to the corporate literature and the in depth interviews.

### **3.4 In depth Interviews**

As mentioned previously when undertaking qualitative research the researcher has different methods he can use which include interviews, focus groups and ethnography. For this project the research method chosen was interviews.

An interview is referred by some authors as a talking questionnaire however interviewing in qualitative research is very different from interviewing in quantitative research mainly because the approach tends to be much less structured in qualitative research as opposed to quantitative research (Sarantakos, 2005; Bryman, 2012).

In qualitative research there are two main interview types which are unstructured and semi-structured interviews. In an unstructured interview the interviewer acts freely in formulating and re formulating questions as required, this type of interview tends to be very similar in character to a conversation (Sarantakos, 2005; Bryman, 2012).

In semi structured interviews the researcher has a list of questions of fairly specific topics to be covered, questions may not follow exactly the same way as outlined in the interview guide but the interviewer does follow a script to a certain level (Bryman, 2012).

A semi structured interview was chosen over an unstructured one in this dissertation for two main reasons. Firstly since this study's research question was exploring different avenues of consumer behaviour a semi structured approach was more suited as the specific issues in the study can be addressed more simply and secondly due to the author's lack of experience in qualitative research an unstructured approach deemed more complex (Wengraf, 2004)

Semi-structured interviews require a number of questions to be prepared in advance, also these questions need to be open ended (Wengraf, 2004). However the interviewee's responses can't be predicted in advance (Wengraf, 2004). Therefore an interview guide was used to remind the author to ask about certain things.

For this dissertation the interview guide was prepared in a way in which the research questions could be answered. It was divided into different constructs similar to the literature review. Some order on the topic areas were formulated to the questions in the interview guide so as to provide some flow to the responses (Brewer, 2012). However during the actual interviews the author was aware to alter the order of the questions if deemed appropriate (Brewer, 2012).

Taylor and Bogdan (1988) state that the tone of a qualitative interview needs to be conversational therefore questions need to be open-ended and descriptive also the interviewer needs to encourage the interviewee to express herself as best as possible. In order to do this the interviewer has to concentrate on listening and waiting for the interviewee to finish speaking and the interviewer needs to know when and how to probe the respondent for more information (Taylor and Bogdan, 1988; Brewer, 2012). Furthermore the questions need to be phrased in a simple and comprehensible manner (Wengraf, 2004).

In qualitative research the interview is usually audio-recorded and transcribed after this approach was used in this study (Silverman, 2005). Furthermore qualitative researchers are interested not just in what person say but also in the way that they say it there for tape recording rather than note taking is more suitable (Byman, 2012).

### **3.4.1 The interview procedure and questions**

The in-depth interviews for this study were conducted between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> of August. Prior to those two pilot interviews were conducted on the 8<sup>th</sup> of August. A majority of the interviews took place at Nottingham University Jubilee campus and three interviews were conducted at Starbucks coffee shop whilst two interviews were conducted at the respondent's residence. The interviews lasted between 25 and 30 minutes. The author attempted to construct a relaxing and calm atmosphere that resembles those in which people naturally talk to each other (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998).

Participants were briefed regarding the purpose of the interview and were encouraged to speak freely and to express what was truly important to them participants were also instructed

to interrupt the interviewer if any questions were misunderstood or deemed offensive (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998; Bryman and Bell, 2003). Participants were also informed the interviews will be recorded and that information will be treated as confidential.

The questions used in the semi-structured interviews were formulated through the literature review. However after conducting two pilot interviews several questions were deemed difficult to comprehend furthermore the author was dissatisfied with the level of insight gained from the interviews. Therefore a second interview guide was re-formulated and subsequently used in this study. It should be emphasized that questions from the interview guide were not exclusive also the order and the type of questions changed according to the respondent. All of the questions used were open-ended structured questions and probing questions were also used. Furthermore the author attempted to facilitate a conversational flow throughout the interview process.

The semi-structured approach used in this study consisted of four sections they are discussed below.

The initial set of questions were screening questions and were aimed to gain an understanding of the participants shopping behaviour , their general attitude towards shopping and also to identify some of the motivational factors positive and negative which encourage the participants to visit certain stores. Insights can be gained as to how males and females perceive certain stores.

Questions such as-

- Would you consider going shopping a hassle or enjoyment?
- What would a perfect/not so perfect day of going shopping be like?
- Why do you choose to go to the stores which you do?
- What motivates you to go shopping ?

The next section of the interview had questions which related to the participants self-concept and also aimed to explore other concepts such as symbolic consumption, store personality and store image.

Self-concept questions-

- Are you a positive person or a negative person?
- Do you think your good looking?
- How important is self-image to you?

Positive and negative cues of respondent's answers were observed to determine if respondents had a low or high self-esteem and self-image.

The next set of questions aimed to explore symbolic consumption and the different meanings consumers attach to stores. At this point of the interview participants were asked to relate their answers to one of the specific stores under research in this study. Although the focus was on clothing stores questions relating to symbolic consumption began by asking participants how they associate meanings towards clothes in general before shifting attention towards clothing stores. This approach was chosen in-order for participants to better grasp the concept of symbolic consumption.

- What do clothes mean to you?
- Do you think that people can express their personality through clothes?
- Do you think clothing stores have a personality?
- Describe the personality of store (x)?

Focus would now shift towards consumer's self-concept and store image. To determine if the specific store relates to the consumers actual self-concept or ideal self-concept.

- Do you see any similarities between store (x) and yourself?
- Do you think that going to store (x) helps you to enhance yourself image?

After this questions exploring store image or the way the store is defined in the mind of the participant will be asked.

- Describe the image of store (x)?
- Describe the other customers of store (x)?
- Describe an experience you have had in store (x)?
- What do you like most/least about store (x)?
- Why do you think others go to store (x)?
- What is the status of the store?

The final part of the interview will have questions related to reference group influence. This section will explore participants informational reference group influence, value expressive

reference group influence and utilitarian reference group influence in relation to clothing stores.

#### Informational reference group

- Are trends/ fashion important to you?
- Do you observe the stores others go to?
- Are you more satisfied when going to these stores?

#### Value expressive reference group

- Do you believe that going to store (x) will enhance yourself image?

#### Utilitarian reference group

- Is it important that others approve the clothing stores you go to?

At the end of the interview each participant was asked if they would like to add any further comments.

### **3.4.2 Advantages of Qualitative interviews**

Some of the main advantages in qualitative interviews are its flexibility allowing the interview to be adjusted to meet diverse situations, another advantage which other research methods lack is the capacity for correcting misunderstandings by respondents and the spontaneous answers that an interview sometimes provides is very valuable for marketing research (Sarantakos, 2005). Finally in depth interviews allows the researcher to get to know people well enough to understand what things truly mean to them.

### **3.4.3 Limitations of Qualitative interviews**

Some of the main limitations of qualitative interviews are that it is very time consuming for example transcribing an hour long interview can take up to four or five hours (Bryman, 2012). Secondly since the interview is a particular kind of situation one cannot assume that what a person says during an interview is what that person believes or will say or do in other situations (Bryman, 2012). Finally the interviewer should have the necessary skills, experience and patience to reap the full benefits of the interview for example Wengraf (2004) states that an interview can be a challenging experience to a first time or novice researcher.

The above mentioned points will be taken into consideration when undertaking the semi-structured interviews for this dissertation.

### 3.5 Sample

A sample can be defined as the subgroup of the population selected for participation in the study” ( Brymn and Bell, 2003). In this dissertation in-depth interviews were taken of ten people. This number of interviews is adequate bearing the time constraints and word limitations of this study.

The sample was distributed equally according to gender five out of the ten participants being women and the remaining five men. There were three reasons for this, firstly the fact that it would provide a more accurate comparison between genders, secondly since a majority of past studies exploring store image have excluded males in their samples it deemed appropriate to include males in this study and finally since clothing retail stores are primarily segmented according to gender it seemed logical to have an equal representation of both genders for this study.

The participants were between the ages 20 and 26. According to Leigh and Gable (1992) consumers or individuals in this age group are in a period of role transition and they rely heavily on symbolic goods to assist them in creating their identities. Furthermore all of the participants were frequent shoppers and were familiar about the two stores investigated in this study. Six of the participants post graduate students at the University of Nottingham studying in various departments, one participant was an undergraduate student whilst another was an MBA student and the remaining two participants’ were working. Moreover the participants were from different ethnic backgrounds hence multicultural views could be obtained from the sample.



Details regarding each participant are shown in the table below. (table1)

Name	Gender	Age	Occupation	Country	Place
Aris	Male	23	Student	Greece	Starbucks
Vinod	Male	20	Student	Sri Lanka	Jubilee compus
Sajitha	Male	24	Accountant	Sri Lanka	Residence
Sanjaya	Male	24	Student	Sri Lanka	Jubilee campus
Damian	Male	25	Student	England	Starbucks
Anna	Female	26	Student	USA	Uni Park Campus
Haley	Female	26	Student	Germany	Jubilee compus
Juliane	Female	23	Student	Germany	Jubilee compus
Christene	Female	23	Student	Germany	Jubilee compus
Chantal	Female	23	Retail worker	Sri Lanka	Residence

(Table 1)

### 3.6 Data Analysis

The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Once this was done the data was analysed. Data analyses is an intuitive and inductive process and in order for the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of what has been researched the data needs to be examined properly (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998).

Coding is the starting point for most forms of qualitative data analysis ( Bryman, 2004). Taylor and Bogdan (1998, pp.151) state that “Coding is a way of developing and refining interpretations of the data furthermore the coding process involves bringing together and analysing all the data bearing on major themes, ideas, concepts, interpretations and propositions”(Taylor and Bogdan, 1998).

For this dissertation the author categorised the data into two levels. The top level codes were categorised according to the main concepts of the dissertation from which the interview questions were derived from namely self-concept, self-image, actual-self, ideal-self, self-esteem, symbolic consumption, store image, store personality, reference groups and gender. The top level codes were then broken down into smaller categories which included satisfaction, motivation and attitudes towards store. Out of the retrieved data the quotations which approved and disapproved the relevant literature were selected and used in the findings and discussion section of this dissertation.

Table 2 summarises the coding structure used to analyse the data arising from the transcribed interviews.

**Table 2**

<b>Main concept</b>	<b>Conversation Topic/ Areas</b>	<b>Specific Words/ Phrases</b>
Store image	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opinions on store</li> <li>• Opinions on customers</li> <li>• Most important components</li> <li>• Least important components</li> </ul>	expensive, cheap, interesting, unique, cool, attentive, ignorant, frequent , occasional, similar ,different
Symbolic Consumption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opinions on clothes</li> <li>• Opinions on self-image</li> </ul>	Important , un important , similar, different
Self-Concept	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opinions about self</li> <li>• Opinions about other customers</li> </ul>	Positive, negative, similar, not similar, better, worse
Shopping behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opinions about shopping</li> <li>• Shopping motivation</li> </ul>	Hate, like, hustle, enjoyment ,fun ,boring, annoying
Reference group influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opinions on fashion/trends</li> <li>• Observation about others</li> <li>• Opinions of others</li> <li>• Approval of others</li> </ul>	Important , un important, follow , don't follow, interested , not interested,

## **Chapter 4: Discussions and findings**

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section will provide a description of the two stores selected for the dissertation. The second section will discuss the research findings which are related to the theoretical concepts in the relevant areas.

### **4.1 Store Background and description**

This section will provide a brief description of the two stores selected for this study. Information about the background of the store, perceived target market and store image will be included from the actual company's point of view. This will be followed by the results of the author's data collection and visits to both stores in Nottingham.

The reason for describing the stores from the companies and authors view is to determine if a difference exists in how the participants perceive the two stores.

#### **4.1.1 All Saints**

##### **Company description**

All saints Spitafields also known as All saints is a British high end fashion retailer. The store was founded in 1994 and sells menswear, womenswear and footwear. The company has seventy plus stores around the world (The romance of Jack the Ripper, 2011). In terms of price all saints products are lower than major fashion houses such as Gucci and Hugo Boss but has more exclusivity than Zara and H & M the average price of merchandise is between £50 to £ 200 (The British invade America again, 2010)

##### **Store image and aesthetic**

The name All Saint's was inspired by both the cool and arty musical All Saint's road in London's Notting Hill (London fashion review blog, 2011). Music culture plays a key role in the All Saint's aesthetic and is illustrated in their clothes through the graphics of the t- shirts as well as from the signature underground music played in the stores. Furthermore All Saints has a long standing history of collaborating with the emerging talent in the British music industry (London fashion review blog, 2011).

The mission statement of All Saints is the following "Our mission is to create a brand that blends culture , fashion and music into a potent formula of describing clothing that expresses individuality and *attitude*"(All Saints Spitafields, 2012). As mentioned in their mission statement maintaining an image to be individual and distinct is at the forefront of All Saints marketing strategy. Furthermore the store strives to ensure that they are not "slaves to trends"

this is carried through from the clothing to the store design (London fashion review blog, 2011).

In terms of clothes All saints is said to have an instantly recognisable aesthetic mixing vintage detailing with a new and fresh innovative design, the colour palette is a simple mix of greys and beiges all made to create the ultimate rugged worker look for men and an androgynous look for women (All Saints at Westfields London, 2012). The style of clothes can also be perceived as being “distressed and dark” (London fashion review blog, 2011; The British invade America again- This time through fashion, 2010).

However it’s not the clothes alone which gives All Saints a signature style. The stores themselves provide a major selling point and a similar style has been replicated in the brands stores world-wide in fact their retail design have become one of the most recognised on the British High Street(Critical shopper- All saints Spitalfields, 2010; All Saints- Brand Profile, 2011).

The stores interior consists of brick work being exposed, dark wood flooring, and antique Singer sewing machines in the store front all gives the feel of a customer walking into a factory space. The stores layout is a mixture of many themes which include gothic, punk and Victorian retro therefore it could be perceived differently depending on the customer. The stores are also very large in size and quite dark only lit up with spot lights.

In terms of the target market the stores shoppers can be aged between 18 and 35. But due to the stores strong brand identity it may only attract a narrow segment of customers. Furthermore the brand does not advertise instead it builds up a loyal customer base and relies on word of mouth advertising.

### **Author’s description of All Saints**

#### **Store Experience**

The All Saints store in Nottingham is also a very large store. When entering the store the author noticed how dark everything inside the store was. The author noticed that the store had very loud music playing. The atmosphere inside the store could be described as combination of a warehouse and a church.

In terms of the layout and merchandising the author felt the store wasn't so well organised. For example there was no clear distinction between the men's and women's section, instead the customer needed to assess this. Furthermore similar types of clothing were scattered in two separate sections of the store which made navigating around the store a little difficult.

The employees of the store were dressed similar to a typical customer of the store in very dark attire. The author found the employees of the store to be quite helpful but not overly friendly or welcoming.

### **The Product**

The clothes were all very dark colours consisted of dark blue, maroon, black, grey and white. Most of the clothes in the store seemed to be very unique from what one would find usually, it could be gathered that the clothes has its own distinctive style from the way the garments were cut and designed.

### **Target market**

At the time of research the customers inside the store were young. The author would assume customers were in their late teens to mid-twenties. Furthermore the author felt the clothes were more suited towards a younger fashion forward demographic who aims to communicate a strong statement in his or her attire. However the store also has some simpler clothes for the less adventurous customer.

The average price of clothes would range between £30 and £70. Therefore it can be suggested that the store would also position its products towards a mature and older demographic.

From the research conducted at the All Saints store the author identified the most distinctive feature of the store to be its unique atmosphere which successfully managed to communicate the stores individuality and distinctive identity. **(Refer Appendix 3 for pictures of the store)**

### **4.1.2 French Connection**

#### **Company description**

French Connection which is also well known by its shorter name FCUK is a British high street retail brand founded in 1972 (French Connection, 2012). The company was set out to create "well designed fashionable clothing that appealed to a broad market". The company has a strong core clothing business and has several stores across the globe also the company

has expanded its portfolio into areas which include men's and women's toiletries, sunglasses, watches and shoes (French Connection, 2012).

### **Store image and aesthetic**

According to French Connections (2012) website its stores are designed to be a true extension of the brand whilst being relevant to their local surroundings, all elements including staff and store design are said to work together in order to create a shopping environment which is a part of the French Connection experience.

The stores incorporate a clean, minimalist simple signature look that French Connection is synonymous for. Furthermore the stores are said to provide an environment where the product takes centre stage (French Connection, 2012).

A crucial element of the French Connection store is the windows. According to the company's website "the windows are crucial to the branding of the product they reflect the pioneering imaginative design and irreverent attitude" (French Connection, 2012). Furthermore the store windows are said to reflect all that's about the brand, its attitude and style whilst acting as a showcase for the collection (French Connection, 2012).

The brand identity of French Connection is to be "sexy, stylish and have attitude with a desire to be original, distinctive and accessible" (French Connection, 2012).

French Connections has a very wide customer base however its core customer base are adults and business people between 25 and 35 ( French connection moves upmarket with a royal connection, 2011).

The company has been striving to attract younger consumers to the store and hence have begun a repositioning exercise since 2009 (French Connection to re-engage young shoppers, 2011). Furthermore young consumers had come to see the store and brand as "unfashionable and uncool"( French Connection to re-engage young shoppers, 2011).

### **Author's description of French Connection**

#### **Store experience**

The French Connection store in Nottingham is a fairly large store located on Victoria Street. While walking towards the store five large rectangular windows advertising the brands 2012 winter and autumn collection catches the author's attention. Upon walking inside the store

white walls, pine floors dominate the store. The store is also very spacious, lit brightly and functionally laid out which makes it easy to navigate through the store.

The employees of the store were quite friendly and helpful also the soft French music playing in the background provided a very relaxing and calm atmosphere to shop in.

## **Product**

At the time of research the store was on full sales mode like a majority of the other high street stores. The clothes were bright and colourful with subtle designs and prints. The author found most of the clothes to be very basic simple and laid back. However the materials and fabric's used indicated that the clothes were of high quality.

## **Target Market**

At the time of research a majority of the customers inside the store were adults. The author would assume that the customers were in their late twenties or mid-thirties. Furthermore as the clothes were quite conservative very simple and lacked something unique to attract more extravagant customers there is reason to believe that this store would not attract teenagers and is more suited towards a demographic in their middle twenties and above whose motivation would be to achieve a smart, clean and simple appearance .

The author believed that the French Connection store was able to communicate a consistent message extending from the clothes to the layout and atmosphere within the store which can be described as uncluttered, clean and classy. However the author felt the store lacked sharp character and was not distinctive enough from other stores. **(Refer Appendix 4 for pictures of the store)**

### **4.1.3 Comparison of the stores**

The author found certain similarities and differences in the two stores. They had similarities in that they were located quite close to each other, clothes were similarly priced also both stores were of the same size.

There were differences in the clothes of the two stores for example French Connection had a brighter and simpler style whereas All Saints was darker and complex. The biggest difference would be in the stores layout, decoration and atmosphere which were in complete contrast of each other. The All Saints store had a strong character and clearly communicated to a certain

demographic and class of customer whilst the French Connection's simple and minimalist store design would appeal towards a mass market.

## 4.2 Main Findings

This section presents the findings of the main study and outlines the key research question of this dissertation which is to investigate why young adults develop preferences towards clothing retail stores.

First it examines store related attributes such as store image, employees and store atmosphere. Then it presents the psychological factors which influence young adults to develop preferences for retail stores which are self-concept, symbolic consumption and reference group influence.

Finally it discusses if a difference exists in preferences between male and female shoppers which is the second research question of the study.

## 4.3 Store Image

To measure how the participants described the store images of the two stores (French Connection and All Saints) an open ended question asking the participants to **“Describe the image of All Saints/ French Connection”** was used. This unstructured open ended image question allowed participants to discuss only what was mostly meaningful and significant to them (Berry, 1969). After this probing questions depending on the different components of store image the participants mentioned was asked.

The findings of this study presented that the participants valued the employees, merchandise, price of merchandise, assortment of merchandise and store atmosphere as the most important elements of store image.

### 4.3.1 Store image of All Saints

The majority of participants described the store image of All Saints as being *“unique and cool”* stating how the store is very different from others. They emphasised these differences existed in the stores clothes which were described as *“edgy, dark and vintage”*. The stores unique atmosphere was also brought up by the participants in particular the sewing machines inside the store which is a trade mark of All Saints were described as being *“cool and nostalgic”*.

Comparing how some of the participants described All Saints to how the actual way All Saints describes itself many similarities were found. For example one of the strongest messages All Saints aims to communicate to its target market through its stores and



merchandise is the expression of “individuality and attitude” likewise most of the participants in their responses described how All Saints is unique, different and has its own identity. As mentioned before All Saint’s was inspired by the All Saints road in London, Notting Hill and the store was meant to symbolise the music culture of the street. Similarly the third statement of one of the participants mentions that the store resembles London.

*“ Well All Saints is definitely something you don’t come across that often like different mass merchandise stores like H and M or ZARA , and the atmosphere in the store and music gives you a certain feeling when you get inside also the collection of clothes they have you cannot really categorise it , you can say it’s different or sort of unique , like some of the clothes they have you might come across it in other stores but the whole selection of clothes sends something or gives this store an image of coolness in a sense the way they set up the whole thing it gives a sense of coolness to the clothes selection that they have” . (Aris)*

*“All saints as a store is just too cool for me .I love everything about it the styles of clothing and shoes makes me want to drool, if I could I would even move my bed room inside this store just to be around some of the gorgeous clothes, and shoes, I love the atmosphere in the store the sewing machines gives the store such a nostalgic look and feel to it . it looks like someone’s workshop and museum rolled into one .I find the staff really helpful and they go out of their way to help find what I exactly need . Also you can shop at a leisurely pace as there’s hardly ever a cue to try on clothes , and they have sales worth dying for.” (Chantal)*

*“well the store is really dark ,its meant to look like someone’s basement with a lot of old stuff in it , for example they got tonnes of old sewing machines in there , even the clothes sort of seem old and the shelves as well .Even though it sounds pretty bad they have managed to put it together in a very cool and artistic sort of way , I think it reminds me of London cause the store is very dark and grey but it’s still sort of vibrant also the clothes they sell If you go to London you would find plenty of men and women dressed like this .(Sajitha)*

Martineu (1959) states how shoppers develop higher preferences and patron stores which have outstanding merchandise and clear cut attractions. Similar findings were evident from the way the participants described All Saints. Furthermore as shown from the statements

above the participants were able to successfully decode some of the messages the store was aiming to communicate.

Some of the participants mentioned how All Saint's conveyed a consistent message and they described how the store links different elements from the merchandise in store to the employee's outfits to communicate a unified image. It was found that this message had a positive influence on some participants enabling them to recall the store at a later time. These findings are consistent with Kotler's (1974) findings where he states that a store's atmosphere can be used as a message creating medium to the target audience.

*"I think it's good for a store if they try to send a unified message in a sense, like a consistent message from the decoration to the music, to the way the employees are dressed to the way they behave to the selection of the clothes they have, so I think it's a good thing going into a store and seeing that they are trying to make a strong statement of who they are, this helps you to definitely remember the store, for example if I wanted to buy say a vintage jacket that is really like the one that they wear in the movies or something, I would have the All saints store pop in my mind and I would drop by this store" (Aris)*

*"I would say that (All Saints) they have something very distinctive about it. It's not main stream also the prints that they use is very different it's not something everybody would wear, so it's definitely trying to appeal to a certain type of aesthetic. also you can tell by how the employees dress, they dress very in line with how the store is branded, also the music they play is very youthful, I definitely think the whole environment, the art work they display to the products, employees, definitely convey a very consistent and grand image it's also youth full, kind of alternative but not crazy, alternative enough to be different but not to be outlandish" (Haley)*

Based on the responses of how the participants described the image of All Saints it is evident that they were able to understand the symbolic message of what the store was about. For example some participants expressed very accurately how the store was meant to be branded. Also some participants were able to identify certain personality factors of the store

#### 4.3.2 Store image of French Connection

When the participants were asked to describe the image of French Connection a majority of the responses were focused on the stores merchandise, store layout and employees.

When describing the store image of French Connection the participants mainly brought up the functional attributes of the store. Furthermore the detail and depth of the responses provided were quite vague in comparison to those given for All Saints. However as mentioned in the companies description of the store French Connection tries to incorporate a “ clean and minimalist look and ensures the product takes centre stage” .Therefore in this context the responses the participants provided can be described as being somewhat accurate with the actual image of French Connection.

*“I really like the store I think it is mainly because I like the clothes .I like the store in Nottingham, I like that its big and has huge ceilings and is also designed to look very simple the clothes are very bright and they play with different materials and are not so focused on colourful patterns like other stores. I also like French Connection because you do not see their clothes being worn very often .I like that the clothes are very well sorted, mostly sorted after colours and lines you can shop their without feeling stressed, You do not see younger people there below twenty one so that also helps as you don’t want to be dressed the same as them” (Anna)*

*“I really do like French connection, I think it’s very exclusive, you also get really good customer care, but at the same time the employees are not making too much effort so you can really take your time with things also , they don’t like pressure you for anything , I really like the clothes because its very much my style I would definitely go in and buy a lot of clothes from their when I have more money” (Juliane)*

However it must be mentioned that some of the participants found it difficult to recall the image of the store. According to Martineau (1959) a shopper finds it difficult to recall a store that lacks a sharp character that does not stand for something special in the eyes of the customer. Nevertheless French Connection defines its target market as being very broad whereas All Saints caters to a narrower market. Kotler (1974) states that if a store is after a homogeneous audience it is a lot easier for that store to develop an image for its customers compared to a store which caters to multiple segments such as French Connection.

Nonetheless it was found in the study that All Saints was the store which had more personality factors and was easier for the participants to recall and also matched more accurately to the authors research and companies description. Furthermore the store image of All Saints in comparison to French Connection was recalled by the participants with more enthusiasm also certain holiday and psychological aspects were mentioned by the respondents.

A majority of the participants recalled the store image of French Connection with more functional attributes whereas the store image of All Saints was recalled with a mix of functional and psychological attributes. Martineau (1959) states that economic factors such as price and merchandise are important for customers however psychological and symbolic factors are said to be of more importance. In this study it was found that the symbolic factors were equally as important as the functional ones.

#### **4.4 The Components of Department store image**

According to Berry (1969,pp.5 ) “ A consumer develops an image of a store on the basis of the totality of his experiences when shopping there, The overall form that this image will take *depends on the respective value that he or she places on the various components of image*” .

Based on the findings of this study four components of Berry's (1969) department store image was mentioned by the participants namely employees ,quality of merchandise ,price of merchandise and store atmosphere. Out of the four components the most dominantly mentioned ones were store employees and store atmosphere.

The findings of these two components will be explored in depth.

##### **4.4.1 Store employees**

According to Martineau (1959) the biggest single factor in the store image is the character of the sales personnel. Similar findings appeared in this study; employees were one of the most frequently mentioned components of store image and were a positive and negative influence to shopper's satisfaction. The participants valued positive interactions with the employees and showed appreciation towards friendly gestures and acknowledgments they also valued employees advice however they did not like it when employees were too assertive and ignorant. The following statements below summarise the positive aspects the participants expressed about the employees of the two stores.

**Interviewer** – “*Can you describe the employees at French Connection?*”

**Participant (Juliane)**- *“I think they really give good advice I think they’re really honest, so for instance if you try on something and you don’t look so good some people in some other stores might mention oh you look great you definitely need to buy it, whereas at French connection they’ll be really honest and suggest that maybe something else suits you better, also I hate it when going to a shop and people try to pressure you going oh!! Can I help you, can I help you? blah blah blah . Like I really hate that I like to look around and stuff and they really balance it very well .showing that they are definitely there for you without pressuring you”.*

**Interviewer** – *“Can you describe the employees at All Saints?”*

**Participant (Haley)**- *“They are very interested in telling you about the product and they also make sure that they are not too pushy which is great ,they can point out what you exactly need , for example if I say I’m looking for a dress like this what do you have ? They’ll show you different options ,they will show me what’s on sale, but they will leave me to make my own choices ,which I appreciate because I don’t like it when someone stands over you I feel a lot of pressure and I can’t make my own choices , but at All Saints I am also completely comfortable with going back to them and asking for their opinion , when I shop there I feel more comfortable asking about if it was between these two which would you choose ? Which would you like best? And I would trust their opinion, which is not the case in all the other places I shop”*

The following two statements clearly indicate that the store employees have a positive influence on the participants these findings are similar to Martineau (1959) and Rich and Portis (1964). Furthermore it is shown that the store employees make the customer feel more comfortable and enhances the shoppers experience (Baker et al, 2002).

Two participants mentioned how they have created a relationship with the stores employees. They both mention how the employees have influenced them to return to the store.

*“His name is mark, he helped me a lot, one time I was in there (French Connection) when I was going to buy this suit and it’s always nice to see him again” (Sajitha)*

*“Most of the other times I’ve been to the store it’s usually been a pleasant experience. Although I feel the employees have identified me as a customer who just comes in to have a look and not buy anything so they’ve been really nice to me”. (Chantal)*

Store employees were mentioned in a negative sense as well similar to Berry's (1969) findings. However only two of the participants mentioned this

*"I think their quite unfriendly really, during all the times I've been there they have just ignored me, and it's stopped me on a few occasions from actually buying anything" (Sanjaya).*

In general a majority of the participants did mention that the employees were important. However it was mainly the female participants who valued the employees the most, the males in the study considered the presence of employees less noteworthy.

#### **4.4.2 Store Atmosphere**

The sensory channels also known as store atmosphere were recalled by most participants. They were able to recall the details of both stores atmosphere fairly accurately. Furthermore their recollection of the stores image was primarily dependent on the stores atmosphere and some respondents described the atmosphere as the main reason they patron the stores.

The statement below is a description of the store atmosphere at All Saints. The participant in this instance states that the atmosphere is the primary reason why he comes to the store. This supports the findings of Kotler (1974) which state that the store atmosphere can creates an image in the shoppers mind and if that image is positive it will influence the shopper to shop in that store.

*"Well first of all I think it's a really cool store I love how they've decorated the place, with the cool sewing machines, the wood and the studio lights and things like that. Even the clothes are really nice, quite unique and different from a lot of other stuff available which I think is really cool and possibly is the main reason why I go to the store. also its really dark the first time I went in it felt as though I was walking into some kind of art gallery ,I just love the way the store looks and feels" ( Sanjaya)*

The statement below describes how the store atmosphere has enhanced a shopper's experience. He goes on to state how the stores atmosphere has influenced his purchase decision making. This is consistent with Belk's (1975) findings which suggest that physical and social surroundings such as décor, noise and lighting can influence a consumers purchasing behaviour.

*“I think it (Store atmosphere) complements the whole image of all saints, It’s different from other stores and I do think it has a certain attractive appeal. For example I came across some all saints t –shirts at tk maxx but they didn’t quite appeal to me the same way they would at the all saints store you know. So I think the store layout adds something positive or enhances the shopping experience”.* **(Damian)**

In-store music was something many of the participants spoke about. It was found that music had a positive influence on the participants. Baker et al (2002) states how favourable music can influence consumer’s perception of time spent in the store similar findings were discovered in this study.

*“Because its calm you tend to spend a lot more time in the store, u can do it in peace, some stores have a lot of loud music playing and sometimes if you don’t like it ,it becomes sort of a turn off . I don’t recollect any music in the French connection stores it’s something rly nice”* **(Damian)**

It was mentioned earlier in the store description of All Saints that music is an essential element of the store and it was evident that some participants identified this. Therefore in this instance it can be said that the music played in a store not only influences the time spent but it also increases an individual’s preference towards the store.

*“well I’ve been twice or thrice , first of all I like the music they were playing at the time so that was a really positive thing , it really challenge me to look to take a more serious look at the stuff they had because in another case I might just take a five minute walk in and walk away , I even like the song I think that was playing , so I got into it looking at the clothes they have and all and checking out the decoration of the store”* **(Aris)**

*“I like the kind of music they play , not the usual mainstream pop music like in other stores and I think the music is like a signal a way of showing that you belong in this store”* **(Sanjaya)**

When comparing the responses between All Saints and French Connection the responses were in line with how the two stores wanted its customers to perceive the store atmosphere. Participants complemented French Connection for its clean, minimalist and functional store layout whilst the atmosphere at All Saints were described as being unique which means both stores were successful in using the atmosphere as a message creating medium (Kotler, 1974 ).

*“French connection is quite clear in what the clothes it sells and the way the store is designed it’s very clean and neat” (Anna)*

*“I think the atmosphere inside the store complements the whole image of all saints, it’s different from other stores and I do think it has a certain attractive appeal” (Sanjaya)*

#### **4.3 Symbolic consumption of clothes and self-concept**

This section will explore the symbolic reasons why young adults prefer clothing retail stores; however the author felt that to achieve this objective it was necessary to develop an understanding of how the participants in the study valued and evaluated their own self-image and also how they perceived clothes.

First of all the participants were asked **“how important self-image was for them?”** All the participants in the study said that self-image was “important” to them. According to Grubb and Grawthol (1967) an individual’s evaluation of himself will greatly influence his behaviour furthermore the more valued the self, the more consistent and organised becomes his or her behaviour.

Therefor since all the participants in the study stated that self-image is of value to them it can be assumed that the image the participants send out about themselves tends to be consistent more often than not (Grubb and Grawthol , 1967) .

*“Self-image is important to me. I do love myself and take care of myself, and I consider myself attractive and I feel comfortable and confident in my own skin”. (Chantal)*

*“it’s important cause that’s how you present yourself, how they look up to you it helps you to stand out , make a statement little little factors but as a whole it adds up to something huge” (Damian)*

*“I’m generally a person who you know cares about what other people think of me , so I wouldn’t say that I act differently , let’s say manipulate my personality or style to please others” (Christen)*

After this the aim was to discover how young adults employ symbolic consumption towards clothing there for the participants were asked **“What clothes meant to them?”**



From the responses provided it was apparent that the participants attached a variety of different meanings toward clothes. For example it was found that clothes were bound to the participant's self-concepts similar to Piacentini and Mailers (2004) study.

Additionally some participants used clothes as a way of self-expression and they also judged other people based on their clothes this is similar to Ligas and Cottes (1999) findings and finally clothes were seen as a tool in which participants used to cultivate and preserve their identities (Elliot and Wattanasuwan, 1998).

*"I kind of judge people on the basis of what they wear, I think it says something about you, for example a guy wearing a leather jacket with spikes or something you get a feeling of what he's like, you could say something maybe about the music culture, what he's into and what kind of person he is"* (**Aris**)

*"You get people who dress in black, what are they called Goths ! And you know you get emo's and hipsters and people like that, their main tool to show their identity is their dress".* (**Sajitha**)

*"As first impressions are made based on your appearance a neatly dressed person tells something about that person. The way I dress is essentially an extension or expresses my personality".*(**Sanjaya**)

*"clothes are definitely more than just clothes , it shows who you are , it definitely reflects on your character on you personality and it is quite a self-statement , for instance I consider myself who doesn't follow every fashion trend that appears and I think I reflect that in my clothing style which is very practical and stuff"* ( **Juliane** )

Furthermore clothes were related positively to role fulfilment making the participants more confident and capable of themselves (Piacentini and Mailer, 2004). Also some participants expressed how clothes can enhance their self-esteem.

*"Clothes make me feel special , if your dressed nicely and others notice this I think people always have a good impression of you"* (**Chantal**)

*"Clothes reflects my personality, it reflects how I want to be perceived by others and it helps to enhance my self-esteem as well"* (**Christene**)

From the statements mentioned above it is evident that the participants buy clothes for more than its functional benefits the different symbolic meanings to which they associate clothes were highlighted. Furthermore it was shown in this section that the participants valued their self-concepts also clothes were found to be bound very close to the participant's personalities and there was evidence in the statements which indicated that the participants directed their behaviour towards further enhancing their self-concepts through the use of clothes (Grub and Grawthol, 1967).

Although this may not be a direct reflection of how the participants would perceive clothing retail stores the findings would provide some clear insights to clothing retailers that self-concept and self-esteem are important psychological elements to young adults.

#### 4.4 Self-image and store image

In order to determine whether the participants were patronising retail stores which were congruent with the images they have of themselves the participants were asked "What kind of message they communicate about themselves through the way *that they dress?*" After this they were asked to explain "which aspects of their preferred retail store appealed to them the most?" Both questions were asked during separate periods of the interview.

In the statement below the participant first states that she is a "*practical and simple person*" and she aims to communicate this through the way she dresses. Moving on when asked why she "*Prefers French connection*" her favourite store she mentions that the store is a reflection of her personality and style. This is an example of a participants store preference being driven by self-consistency in other words the store is congruent to the participants actual self.

**Interviewer** – "*What kind of message would you like to communicate about yourself?*"

**Participant (Juliane)**- "*I guess I want to send a message that others can easily get on with , not overly complicated , not a fashionista ,I don't want to be seen as a superficial Barbie ,who cares about pink clothes and glitter so I think I try to express that by the way that I dress . I am a more practical and simple person I don't like to make a fuss about things*"

**Interviewer** – "*What appeals to you most about French Connection?*"

**Participant (Juliane)** – "*I really do like French Connection, I think it's very exclusive, it's very much my style which is quite classy and perhaps practical so they*

will have relatively simple ways of tailoring , their jumpers and trousers, that *probably is a reason why I love French connection so much because it's very similar to my sense of style and who I am as a person*”

Furthermore it was found that among the majority of the male participants in the study the stores were also congruent with their actual self. An example of this is shown in the statement below where a participant explains that he aims to be unique and different from other people he then goes onto explain how All Saints enables him to be different, cool and unique thus his main reasons to develop a preference for this store.

**Interviewer** – *“What kind of message would you like to communicate about yourself?”*

**Participant (Sanjaya)**- *“I want to look different from other people and I make a conscious effort to do so , when I notice I dress similar to a lot of other people I try to change my style and hence I end up going shopping again and maybe stop buying stuff from that store and try going to a different store”.*

**Interviewer** – you mentioned you like All saints why is this?

yes I do, their clothes are really different and I like being different ..., a lot of their t-shirts even their plain ones have such a unique element in them I really love and it makes me feel cool.

Three female participants expressed how the store was congruent with their ideal self. The first quotation explains how one of the participants prefers French Connection because she believes it reflects the image of an *“independent business woman”* to which she aspires to become.

The second statement provides an example of how another participant prefers All Saints because the store enables her to express her “exciting side” and helps her “get out of her *comfort zone*”. In the last statement one of the participants explains how the store enhances her self-esteem because visiting the store helps her to look distinctive from other people she also mentions that she would like to work towards affording more of the stores clothes in the future.

*“I like to be business like, something to reflect the job that I’m going to do, I really love French connection because it reflects the image of an independent woman”*  
(Christine)

*“I think it (All Saints) definitely enables me to blow out a little bit more of my exciting side I guess like I have , hoodies and sweat shirts and dresses that I obviously couldn’t wear in every situation , because of the patterns and the colours but it’s nice to get outside your comfort zone a little bit and this store lets me do that”*  
(Halie)

*“ I really wish I was able to afford more of the clothes in that store , but I guess I could work towards it in the future , also just because its so unique even though other stores like top shop have a similar style the clothes of all saints has something very distinctive about it”* (Chantal)

Bellenger et al (1976) and Stern et al (1977) have previously demonstrated the existence of a relationship between a retail patron’s image and actual self-image given a preferred store. Similar findings were found in this study when the participants were asked to **“describe the other customers of All Saints and French Connection?”** Four participants clearly stated the stores match their actual personalities whilst two more stated the store’s customers partially match their actual self.

*“They have this essence of coolness in the store, it’s really broad to say cool people but I would say people like me in a sense you know people who are updated with all the new trends they have a unique style about them, they don’t do whatever is in fashion now, they have a consistent image for them self”* (Aris)

*“Someone who’s trendy, has a good sense of style and is aware of fashion, at the same time someone whose also not afraid to be different a bit like me I suppose personality wise maybe with a little bit more money”* (Chantal)

Some female participants expressed that the retail patron image of the stores matched with their ideal self-image. The quote below is an example of a participant who likes French Connection. She has an ideal image of a business woman and she enjoys going to the store

during sales season because the stores customers have an image consistent with her ideal image.

*“I think I don’t quite belong there but in sales it’s different and the people who usually are there are business women who have a good income and can afford to go there. But when I start working I could see myself being one of their loyal customers”*  
**(Juliane)**

In conclusion the findings indicate that the store selection and preferences are driven by both self-consistency (actual self) and self enhancement (ideal self). Although a majority of the participants expressed that their preferred stores were more congruent with their actual self-images. This is inconsistent with the findings of Stern et al (1977) where they state that store preference is only related to an individual’s actual self.

One reason the stores were more congruent with the participant’s actual self than ideal self could be because a majority of the participants in this study had high self-esteem. Therefore it can be assumed that they would be more comfortable and confident about their individual identities (Piacentini and Mailer, 2004 ; Elliot and Wattanasuwan, 1998)

It was also found that the participants may decide not to shop at a particular store if he or she felt the image of the store was not consistent with his or her own perceptions preferences (Stern et al, 1977).

*“There are some stores you wouldn’t even bother going inside to not because you can’t afford it but it just isn’t your style and it doesn’t match up to yourself image. Like I’ve never been to any skater shops in my life in general there are some stores just by looking at them you know it’s not for you and I don’t even bother going inside because it’s most likely going to be a waste of my time”.* **(Sanjaya)**

*“Yeah but its (All Saints) just not me you know , if I were to wear those clothes , I don’t know , I may still look good but I won’t be sure exactly how to carry myself . It might seem as if I’m trying too hard to be British, trying to fit in so it won’t reflect the person I am”* **(Sajitha)**

Martineau (1959) stated that some stores may intimidate a shopper whilst others may seem beneath a shopper. Also the subjective elements such as the atmosphere, status and

employees influence a shopper's attitude towards a store and in some cases can make the shopper feel uncomfortable.

Similar findings were discovered in this study for instance some participants held negative attitudes and views about the clothes, other customers and employees and all these factors deterred participants from purchasing any items in these stores.

*“Although I do like their clothes they’re a little too hippy for me, and for that reason I just think I am one of those people who can’t wear all saints clothes, do you understand what I mean. Also I think the clothes are really skinny and just made for thin people, and sometimes even the employees look weird at me, so it’s just one of those stores I go with my friends, I also feel the style is very English so it’s not really my kind of thing” (Anna).*

*“I think it’s cool, yea but it’s just not me you know if I were to wear those clothes, I don’t know, I may still look good but I won’t be sure exactly how to carry myself. It might seem as if I’m trying too hard to be British , trying to fit in so it won’t reflect the person I am therefore I haven’t bought clothes from this store” (Sanjaya)*

An interesting observation was that out of the five participants who had expressed something negative about the stores four of them were male shoppers.

#### **4.5 Symbolic interactionism**

It was found in the study that effects of symbolic interactionism existed among some participants towards retail stores however it did not influence their purchase behaviour.

Symbolic interactionism occurs when individuals are assumed to relate to objects or events based on the symbolic meanings provided by society (Leigh and Gabel, 1992, p. 28). This type of purchasing occurs when consumers acquire goods or services for what it signifies based on the symbols attached by society (Leigh and Gabel, 1992)

The first statement below shows that the participant is aware of the symbolic meaning associated with the store “Primark”. However she chooses to ignore the symbolic meaning given to this store by society. The second statement is similar to the first however instead of focusing on a single store the participant speaks about stores in general.

*“I think people sort of look down on Primark because it’s cheap and the quality is not that good, but I have gotten loads of complements about certain clothes I’ve bought*

from there ,and to see the shock on peoples face afterwards is always a delight . So I *honestly don't have a problem with buying clothes from stores others don't approve of*" (**Chantal**)

*"Although I'm aware of people's opinions and that sort of thing about different stores. I wouldn't say it would influence me to the extent to alter the way I dress or which stores I go to. I wouldn't think it's cool"* (**Aris**)

Reasons why these participants are not affected by symbolic interactionism maybe because they are confident about their identities and since young adults of the samples age group do not place high levels of importance on social group membership they would be less likely to be affected by the symbolic definitions labelled on to certain clothing stores by society unlike teenagers who are more susceptible to group influence (Leigh and Gabel, 1992). Furthermore another reason for this could be because consumer's reliance on symbolic images and meanings recede with age as consumers become more mature (Belk, 1982).

#### **4.6 Reference group influence**

A reference group can be defined as "a person or group of people that significantly *influences an individual's behaviour*" (Bearden et al, 1989, p.473). The findings in this study showed reference group's influence did affect participants towards developing preferences for clothing retail stores. It was only Informational and value expressive group influence which affected the participants in their store preferences. However utilitarian reference group influence was not evident among the participants.

##### **4.6.1 Informational group influence**

Some participants expressed how they followed trends and observed the stores their close friends and family went to. Previous research have shown that peers are the dominant influence on young adults compared to parents and family similar findings were discovers in this study

Furthermore informational influence among the participants was used mainly to acquire what they perceived was a good product or store (Aunty and Elliot, 2001).

"I pay attention to where my friends go and if they have a positive experience and tell me about it, I would definitely be more inclined to visit those stores and check them out" (**Haley**)

*“Well in Sri Lanka there wasn’t a French Connection but a lot of my friends who’d been abroad said how good the store was and I really liked the clothes they were wearing, so that definitely influenced me, also my brother had this French connection shirt which I loved a lot, so by the time I’d come to the UK, I sort of liked the store even before I’d taken my first step inside” (Sanjaya).*

Some participants expressed how they observe their friends and different trends but primarily relied on their own judgement about which stores they went to.

*“I do follow trends to some extent but not entirely, I usually make my own judgement about clothes and stores but sometimes when you wear something that is approved by a fashion magazine or website you slightly feel more confident and cooler” (Damian).*

*“I guess I follow trends but just a little. I usually makes my own decisions. I want to be different so I try my best to also look different I and I hope people can notice that” (Sajitha)*

#### **4.6.2 Value Expressive Reference Groups**

Value expressive reference group influence occurs when an individual’s motive is to enhance or support his self-concept (Park and Lessig, 1977). They may participate for two reasons. Firstly to express or bolster ones ego consistently with the image attached with the referent group and secondly because one would develop an attachment or liking for the group (Park and Lessig, 1977).

In this study some participants showed evidence of both behaviours however a majority of the responses linked their value expressive reference group influence to groups that were consistent to their own image. The reason for this could relate back to the participants having high self-esteem and being comfortable with their own identities.

The statement below shows that the participant likes a store because it is consistent with the image of the referent group she admires.

*“I like to be business like, something to reflect the job that I’m going to do; I really love French connection because it reflects the image of an independent woman” (Christen)*



One participant described the customers of a store he liked being similar and consistent with his self-image. However he did not provide a title or identify himself with any group however he mentioned certain characteristics such as “cool people” and likened himself to the stores customers.

*“it’s really broad to say cool people but I would say people like me in a sense you know people who are updated with all the new trends they have a unique style about them, they don’t do whatever is in fashion now, they have a consistent image for them self” (Aris).*

It is somewhat evident from the responses above that stores patron by reference groups has lead to an increased connection between the participants and the stores which ultimately could result in the participants heightening their preferences towards these stores.

#### **4.6.3 Consumers need for Uniqueness**

Participants expressed their desires towards creating their own identity and choosing to be different from other people rather than becoming a conformist or wanting to be similar to others. Furthermore some participants expressed how they seek and prefer certain clothing stores which enabled them to successfully diverge away from other consumers and enabled them to better signal their identities (Berger and heath, 2007).

*“Well I like to buy clothes which a lot of people don’t like. so in my age I rather go to a shop like French connection rather than H & M , because I don’t like to see another girl wear the same thing that I’m wearing . I think it’s because you don’t want to be the standard and you don’t want to be like everybody else you want to be different”.*  
**(Anna)**

Uniqueness literature suggests that whenever people feel overly similar and undifferentiated to others they will take steps to reduce this negative emotional state by engaging in a variety of uniqueness seeking behaviour (Berger and Heath, 2007). Similarly the statement below shows how one participant stopped patronising one store because he noticed a lot of other people wearing clothes from the same store. This type of behaviour is also known as counter conformity and occurs when people feel that they are similar to others (Tain el al, 2001).

*“I used to wear a lot of clothes from top man as I came to the UK, then I just noticed so many other guys wearing the same thing it was instantly recognisable and it made*

me feel low and ordinary .So I thought to myself I need to stop buying clothes from top man because *I didn't want to look similar to all those other guys*” (Vinod)

Tian et al (2001) state how unique products can be used to gain desired evaluations from others furthermore it is said to increase one's self esteem. Similar findings were evident in this study when participants purchased items from less popular stores among their peers.

*“French Connection is quite unknown in Germany for example, and when I wear their clothes sometimes other people tell me I look nice in them and I'm like Yay!!”*  
(Christen)

*“It's also a good feeling when you find something really awesome from a store that no one has really heard of or a store no one thought could have such great clothes”*  
(Chantal)

#### 4.7 Differences between genders

This section aims to address the second research question of this study which is to identify if a difference exists among males and females in their preferences towards clothing retail stores.

First it classifies the shopping orientation and behaviour of the male and female participants in this study. Then it identifies the similarities and differences among the male and female participants based on the same concepts which were used to address the first research question.

##### 4.7.1 Shopping behaviour and Attitudes.

According to Bellenger and Koraonkar's (1982) framework it was found that all the male participants in this study were economic or convenient shoppers who have a high opportunity cost for shopping and they feel that shopping is not an enjoyable use of their time. Whilst the female participants in this study were found to be recreational shoppers who have a low opportunity cost for shopping activities and enjoy their time shopping (Bellenger and Koraonkar, 1982).

All of the participants were asked if *“They enjoy shopping?”* There was a significant difference in answers provided by the females and males participants. All five female participants said they *“did enjoy shopping”* therefore they can be classed as recreational shoppers as they enjoy shopping as a leisure time activity.

Furthermore the female participants engaged in shopping for multiple reasons besides the obvious motive of buying something which is consistent to Tauber's (1972) findings which state that social and personal motives also influence shoppers.

The quotations below are examples of the self-gratification motive where consumers engage in shopping or go to a store to reward themselves, shopping here is treated as a diversion from daily life and represents a form of recreation (Tauber, 1972).

*"I tend to go shopping if I have done a lot of work, I just tell myself oooh lets go shopping , to treat myself a little bit , it's just nice it relaxes me it makes me really happy and pleasant"* **(Juliane )**

*"Shopping activates that part of my brain, that feeling when I bought something that gives me satisfaction and, you know conformation that I treated myself with something good "* **(Christene)**

The female participants also engaged in shopping to experience sensory benefits such as touching, handling and wearing clothes (Tauber, 1982).

*"I like to try things on and feel fabrics it gives you a better sense of like the quality, it gives you an idea of how it will match and how it will fit ,so I enjoy shopping in store"* **(Haley)**

*"I love to search through different kinds of clothes, touch them, feel the different textures and best of all try them on. I also enjoy exploring new stores"* **(Chantal)**

Also a majority of the female participants expressed their preference in going shopping with friends as opposed to going alone which highlights the social benefits these participants associate with shopping (Tauber, 1972).

*"Well I definitely prefer to go shopping with friends. I think it's always nicer to get someone else's opinion when you're making a purchase"* **(Haley)**

*"I also treat it as a social activity, sometimes I just go together with friends because they need to go somewhere , so I just accompany them and I end up buying something , and maybe when I'm in a bad mood it might just cheer me up a little bit"* **(Juliane).**

Unlike the females the males in the study can be categorised as economic or convenience shoppers as they dislike shopping or are neutral toward it (Bellenger and Korgaonkar, 1980).

When asked if the male participants “enjoy shopping?” the following responses were provided.

“Not all of the time, sometimes I see it as an end itself in a sense I only go when I need *something to buy something not necessarily to try something on ...When I feel I need to supplement my clothing selection I tend to go shopping*” **(Aris)**

“*Well I would say not so much , at the same time I don’t hate it either..*” **(Sanjaya)**

“*Well not really it’s something that needs to be done, like when I feel the need to get new clothes, I usually make the trip to go shopping*” **(Sajitha)**

The participants were asked to “describe a perfect day of shopping?” A majority of their answers were focused towards the objective of buying something and minimising the expenditure of time which is another characteristic of an economic shopper (Bellenger and Korgaonkar, 1980).

“*It doesn’t really matter about the experience the weather or whatever I just get my stuff and get out. And it depends whether, I got a lot of time or not, being a student here I have my free days and not so free days but anyway I just want to get my stuff done fast*” **(Damian)**

“It would be one where I buy some really nice clothes , not spend too much money *and also it needs to be quick because I honestly can’t spend a lot of time doing it , it really makes me tired after a certain point in time*” **(Sanjaya)**

As can be seen from the statements above there appears to be a significant difference between the male and female participants in the study. The male participants engage in shopping mainly from a purchasing or functional perspective, they are more concerned about the time they spend shopping rather than the value obtained from it.

According to Bellenger and Korgaonkar (1980) this may mean that the males in this study are more selective in the stores which they decide to go and would be reluctant to explore new ones. Furthermore they would be less interested about the atmospherics and secondary benefits in store (Kotler, 1974).

The females in the study enjoy shopping and they associate shopping with other motives besides that of purchasing something. The motives identified among the female participants

were diversion from the routine of daily life, self-gratification, sensory stimulation and social motives (Tauber, 1972).

Furthermore the females in the study as mentioned before can be classified as recreational shoppers as they tend to spend more time shopping, collect more information from different stores and they also appreciate the aesthetics and decorations in stores more compared to the male shoppers who were found to be economic shoppers. ( Bellenger and Korogaonhar, 1980).

#### **4.7.2 Gender differences based on concepts**

During the interviews the female participants were more descriptive and enthusiastic in their responses compared to the male participants. However the male participants did contribute with some interesting insights and some noteworthy differences were found among the male and female participants of this study.

##### **Store image**

The store image of both stores All Saints and French Connection was recalled equally well by both male and female participants. It was found that the female participants valued the employees more compared to the males who considered the presence of employees less noteworthy.

It was mentioned previously how the male participants were economic shoppers and is less likely to pay attention to a stores atmosphere compared to female shoppers (Bellenger and Korgaonkar, 1980). However the findings in this study indicate that the males were equally as attentive about the stores atmospheres which are different from Bellenger and Koraonkar (1980) findings which state that only females are attentive to a stores atmosphere.

##### **Symbolic consumption of clothes and self-concept**

Both male and female participants mentioned that self-image and clothes were of high importance to them. This was evident as both genders expressed how clothes can be used as a tool to present their identities and one on which to judge others on. This also indicates that clothes are closely bound to their personalities.

However it was only the female participants who expressed that clothes can enhance their self-esteem. Grubb and Grawthol (1967) state that one of the reasons an individual would experience self-esteem from an object is when it is recognised by others through forms of interaction. This would indicate that females are more critical of others views and opinions about clothes than the males in this study

### **Self-image and store image**

The comparison of participant's self-image and store image indicated that for a majority of the males in the study their preferred stores were more congruent with their actual self-images. Whereas the female participants preferred stores congruent with their ideal self-images.

Furthermore a higher percentage of male participants expressed something negative about the subjective elements of a store such as the employees and atmosphere. This could be because the male participants in this study were classed as economic shoppers who tend to minimise the time required when going shopping there for they would be more selective and critical towards the stores which they go to (Bellenger and Koraonkar, 1982).

### **Reference Group influence**

It was found that both males and females were influenced by informational reference group influence towards clothing stores. However it can be established that the females in this study were more susceptible to informational reference group influence as it appeared they were more likely to act based on the observation and opinions of others about clothing stores compared to males.

No such differences were identified between genders for value expressive reference group influence.

### **Consumers need for uniqueness**

Both male and female participants equally expressed their desires to be different and mentioned how they prefer stores that help them to diverge away from society. Furthermore both male and female participants expressed how they prefer stores which enable them to make a strong statement.

## **Chapter 5 Conclusion, Implications , limitations and future research**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

This study explored how young adults develop preferences towards clothing retail stores. The study also aimed to identify if a difference existed among male and female shoppers in their preferences. The study focused upon the psychological as well as some of the functional aspects which would motivate consumers to develop preferences for clothing retail stores drawing upon consumer behaviour literature which included symbolic consumption, self-concept, store image congruity and reference group influence. Participants were asked to base their responses on two high end clothing stores which were French Connection and All Saints. The two stores were selected based on the preference of the research sample of this study.

It was found that the above mentioned concepts did affect the participants and also helped them to develop preferences for clothing retail stores. Firstly the results of this study identified that a store which had more personality and symbolic characteristics was easier for participants to recall. Furthermore the psychological aspects related to store image were expressed with more enthusiasm by the participants who indicated that they were more or equally important compared to the functional characteristics of a store (Martineau, 1959).

Employees, merchandise, price of merchandise and store atmosphere were identified as the most important components of store image. Furthermore these were found to be the main reasons which drew the participants to their preferred clothing stores. The employees were found to positively and negatively influence the shoppers experience whilst the store atmosphere was identified as the main message creating tool of a store.

In terms of the psychological factors, it was found that the participants associate different symbolic meanings towards their clothes. Clothes were closely bound to participant's self-concepts and were used as a tool to communicate their identity, and to enhance their self-esteem.

An interesting finding was that some participants attached the same symbolic meanings they attached to clothes to their favourite clothing stores as well. Overall the participants expressed how they preferred stores that were congruent with their actual self-image. However some female participants did indicate that they preferred stores which were

congruent to their ideal self-image. Furthermore some participants chose not to patron stores which were not consistent to their self-concepts.

The role of reference groups proved to be another significant factor in this study as informational reference group influence was evident among a majority of the participants as they chose to use it more as an evaluative tool to make the best purchase. Value expressive reference group influence was evident among some participants. Furthermore it was found that stores patron by reference groups lead to an increased connection between the participants and the stores which resulted in the participants heightening their preferences towards the stores.

A common characteristic among the young adults in this study was that they were very self-aware and individualistic and many of them voiced their desires to be unique. Similarly they expressed their motivation in selecting clothing stores which enabled them to be different among other consumers.

Comparing the findings between genders, the general conclusion was that females were more susceptible in their preferences towards both the functional and psychological factors compared to males. However some minor differences among the male and female participants were identified. The most noteworthy difference was that the males preferred stores which were similar to their actual self-concept compared to the female participants whom preferred stores congruent with their ideal self-concepts. Also reference group influence especially value expressive was mainly evident among the female participants.

## **5.2 Marketing Implications**

The findings in this study may offer useful marketing implications to clothing retail stores which aim to attract young adults.

1. Retail managers can attract its desired target market to their store by engineering all the elements so that they parallel the characteristics of the target market's self-concept. Furthermore the store should be dissimilar to other competing stores so that the matching process between the self and store image is simplified to the customer (Stern et al, 1974).
2. The findings of this study highlighted how the symbolic properties (psychological) of a store are equally important as the functional qualities. Therefore clothing stores can



develop advertising messages which communicate certain symbolic messages for example a customer's ideal self-image.

3. Clothing stores should aim to position their stores or build a connection with their target market on a personal level. This self-store connection may lead towards attitudes that are not very susceptible to change. Furthermore the store would be able to gain a competitive advantage because this type of connection is difficult to imitate.
4. Some minor differences between genders were found in this study. Therefore retailers cannot assume that males and females have similar store preferences.

### **5.3 Limitations and Future Research**

Every piece of research faces some limitations and this study is not an exception. First of all the author felt it was necessary to include male and female participants for this study in order to highlight some differences between them. However some of the male participants were not as enthusiastic in their answers during the semi-structured interviews.

Secondly two clothing stores were selected in this study (All Saints, French Connection). Although these two stores were selected by way of a pilot study not all participants were familiar with both stores. A majority of them were familiar with just one; therefore a direct comparison between the stores could not be done.

Also the inexperience of the author in conducting qualitative interviews may have reduced the quality and depth of responses. The author felt the latter interviews conducted were of more depth compared to the initial interviews. Furthermore when interviewing female participants the author being a male could not relate as well with them, which may have reduced the quality in their responses.

In terms of future research a similar study can be based on one culture in order for it to be more generalisable. Also future research could explore the negative aspects of store preference in other words why consumers do not like clothing stores.

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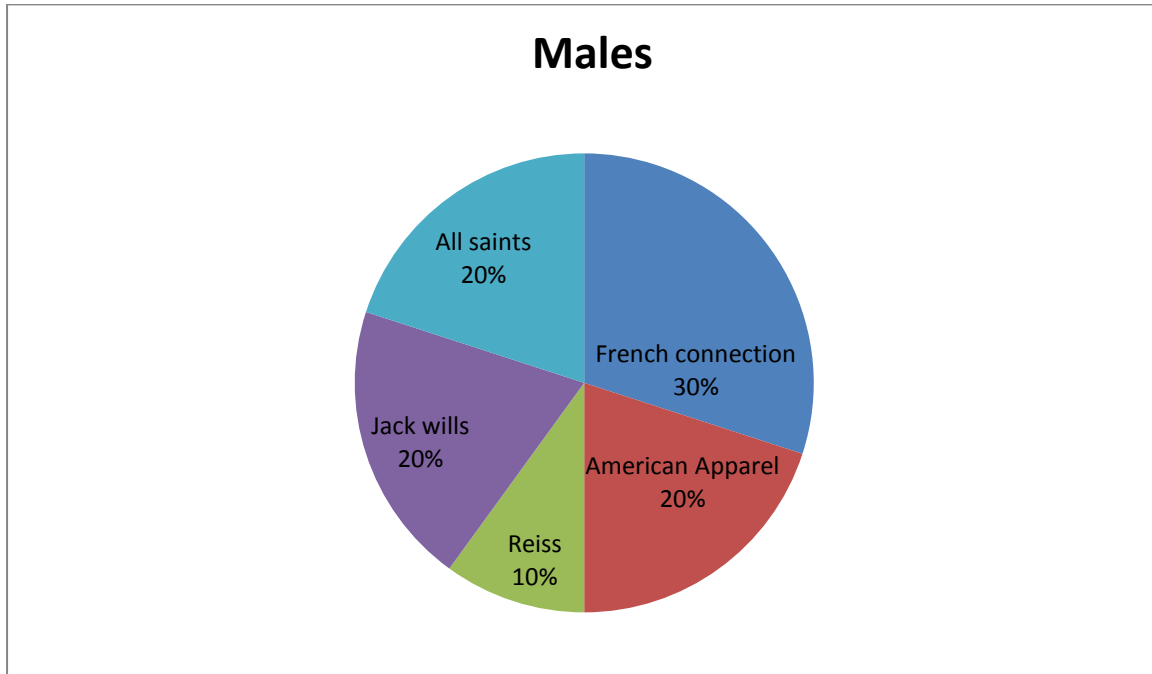
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## Appendices

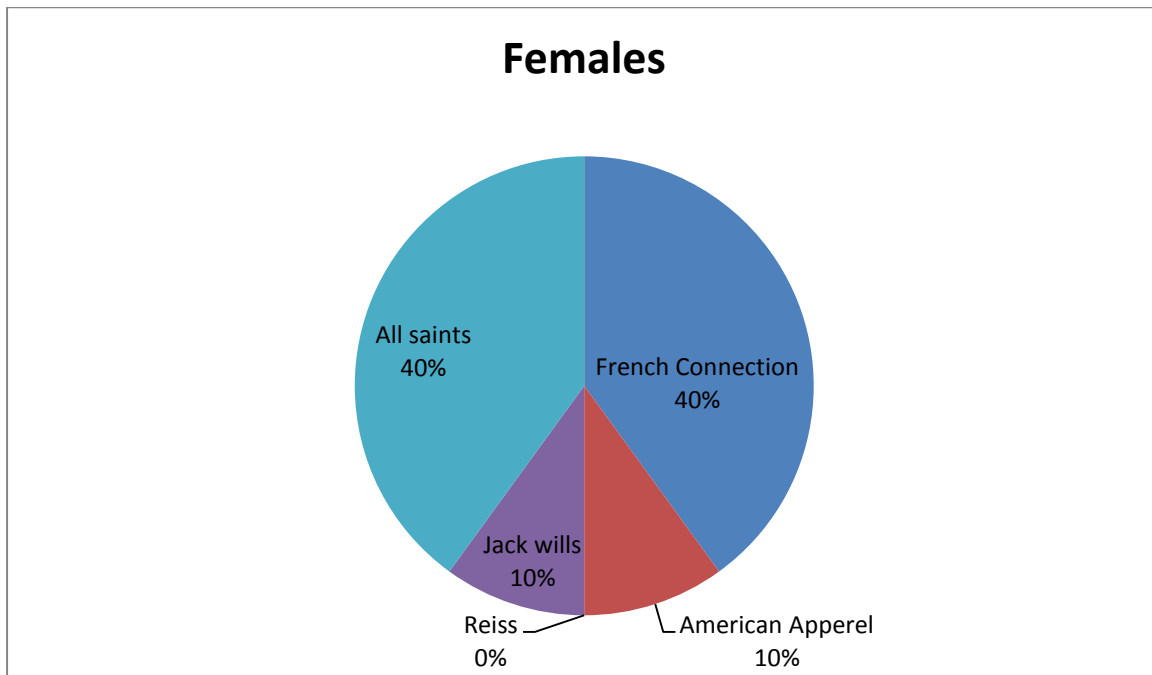
### Appendix 1

Figure 2 Popular stores among male participants



### Appendix 2

Figure 3 Popular stores among female participants



## Appendix 3

### Store pictures of All Saints



## Appendix 4

### Pictures of French Connection



## **Appendix 5**

**This section provides two samples of the qualitative interview transcripts.**

### **Transcript of Aris**

**Int – do you enjoy shopping?**

**R – Not all of the time sometimes I see it as an end itself in a sense I only go when I need something to buy something, not necessarily to try something on, but I would say I do enjoy it. .... When I feel I need to supplement my clothing selection I tend to go shopping , for example when I came to the UK the weather was a lot different to what it was in Greece so I had to buy a lot of warm clothes and stuff that I wear on top of my clothes .**

**Int – How often would you go shopping?**

**R – I engage in some type of shopping activity at least once a month**

**Int – What would be a perfect day of shopping for you?**

**R – I would start off with a coffee, and I'll go around a couple of stores, I don't usually buy something the first time I see it so I'll try a few different stores first, I prefer if the stores are close to one another like in a shopping mall or something , that allows me to try on a bunch of clothes in a number of stores and then compare and try buy the one I like the best . So the perfect day of shopping would be visiting the stores of some of the brands that I like,**

**Int – are you a positive or a negative person?**

**R – I would say I'm neutral, I get excited easily sometimes, but I'd say I'm a positive person .i try not to see the negative side of things**

**Int – Do people find you interesting?**

**R – Well. it depends on what people, I believe that people my age would find me interesting**

**Int – how important is self-image to you?**

**R – ugh well , it's a way of expressing yourself , not necessarily expressing it to yourself but others as well , but I also wear clothes I like when I'm at home not exactly formal clothes or anything ,but I don't wear something that I don't like , just because no one will see me dressed shabbily , but I do like a lot of clothes I like the texture the way it looks , so I obviously take care of myself when I go out , I want to look good , it's not something I do for others , I think its 50- 50 I do it for myself as well as others .**

**Int – what do clothes mean to you?**

**R – as I said I kind of judge people on the basis of what they wear , I think it says something about you , for example a guy wearing a leather jacket with spikes or something you get a feeling of what he's like , you could say something maybe about the**

music culture , what he's into and what kind of person he is so I think it sends a message to people you socialise the stuff that you wear ,

Int – would you send a particular message about yourself?

**R – I don't know , I don't exactly have a title of the message I want to send across, but I try to make sure the stuff I wear is consistent in the sense that they all look alike , that does not mean that they are the same brands or same colours. I like to wear hoodies and jeans that are really formal pair of pants, I like to be really casual, and so it all fits a certain kind of style,**

Int – how would you describe your style?

**R - I would say relaxed, stuff you would wear and could feel comfortable with, stuff which are not really tight , also i don't like to buy a lot of expensive stuff , because i don't want to be taking so much care of my clothes , I don't want to feel like I cannot touch here or touch there or anything so the message maybe very casual , relaxed .**

Int - And would your sense of dress represent yourself in some way ?

**R - ya I think it does , but I believe that since I came to the UK that kind of changed the whole dress code thing in the sense I had influences of people I saw in the street of UK , this slightly changed the whole dress code thing having see the way other people dress in the street like other students and youth which is sort of different from what it is in greece but It still remains the same pretty much the same clothes as I wore before but it just has some additions and has been affected from the people i interact and the people I see .**

Int – as you mentioned how clothes have a certain image or personality about them. Would you say that different clothing stores have different personalities?

**R – definitely they do, I would go to a certain store because it has a general type of clothes and a specific type of clothes that I like, I would choose between stores that have the type of thing that I like so for example I like , clothes that are sold by Zara but I don't like clothes which are sold by Abercrombie , I would also go into a skate clothing shop than go to a formal trendy kind of store .**

Int – Can you describe the image of all saints?

**R – well it's definitely something you don't come across that often like different mass merchandise stores like H and M or ZARA , and atmosphere in the store and music gives you a certain feeling when you get inside also the collection of clothes they have you cannot really categorise it , you can say it's different or sort of unique , like some of the clothes they have you might come across it in other stores but the whole selection of clothes sends something or gives this store an image of coolness in a sense the way they set up the whole thing it gives a sense of coolness to the clothes selection that they have .**

Int –Could you describe the feeling you said that you get when your inside the store?

**R – well I've been twice of thrice , first of all I like the music they were playing at the time so that was a really positive thing , it really challenge me to look to take a more serious look at the stuff they had because in another case I might just take a five minute walk in and walk away , I even like the song I think that was playing , so I got into it**

looking at the clothes they have and all and checking out the decoration of the store , so it was definitely something ... it was obvious it wasn't something ordinary,... it was something unique and it's a store that is very different from the stores which I usually go to which they don't really have a certain character , which is so distinct .

Int – You mentioned the decorations of the store what can you say about this ? 3,6

R - I think it's good for a store if they try to send a unified message in a sense , like a consistent message from the decoration to the music, to the way the employees are dressed to the way they behave to the selection of the clothes they have , so I think it's a good thing going into a store and seeing that they are trying to make a strong statement of who they are, this helps you to definitely remember the store compared to the store that you would go where you would see a bunch of stuff from sports stuff , to casual wear to everything , you will definitely remember all saints , for example if I wanted to buy say a vintage like jacket that is really like the one that they wear in the movies or something , I would have the all saints store pop in my mind and I would drop by this store .

Int – you briefly mentioned the employees of the store , what were your recollection about them ?

R – Well they were nice, it's always nice when someone greets you with a smile , it also helps when they don't push you and ask, what are you looking for ? so its good , they were helpful but not too aversive , they weren't standing next to you hoping you would ask them something and but it's not something that was really memorable their employees , but the general experience was positive it was good .

I really do like the store a lot , it's just that I found it a bit expensive , and as I said I don't' enjoy buying a lot of expensive clothes I do have some , but its not something I do all the time , I may not do it once a month but maybe once every 3 months .if I need something specific say If I need a new coat which I want to last for a certain period of time so I might as well pay a bit more for it . But I need to be sure the quality of the product would last for the amount of time I want it to last . and as I said before how all saints pops up in my mind when I would need a jacket or so , so I think their distinctive appeal or look has an impact on my recollection of the store .

Int – how would you describe the other customers of the store? 3,6 ,2, 4, 5

R – as I said they have this essence of coolness in the store , it's really broad to say cool people but I would say people like me in a sense you know people who are updated with all the new trends they have a unique style about them , they don't do what ever is in fashion now , they have a consistent image for them self , its not like all saints is cool this year but next year another store will be cooler or another dress code will be cooler or good , the have their signature style which ensures that they will be cool every year .

I think yea if someone is a regular shopper at the store I think he is likely to be concerned about the way he looks , which I'm not saying is a bad thing , he just likes to make a statement about who he is and that is why they buy from this store ,

Int – what would you say the status of the store would be?



**R – I'd say medium to high , I'm just judging this on the prices and some of the stuff they have are smart casual and all and some are really formal and you would most likely wear them on special occasions but , I would say medium to upscale status .**

**Int – Are trends important to you ? 4**

**R – I wouldn't say so, as I said, I might be slightly affected by the way some people dress, for example as I said when I came to the UK I noticed how some people dressed differently I observed this and I guess I improved the way I dressed , not like actually changing and buying a whole new wardrobe just supplementing certain elements . like I've see some people wearing certain things of which I've liked, but I'm not really someone who follows trends and wants to know what the hype this year is or something , I must tell you that I have clothes which I have for more than six years and I still wear them , I just wear something until it tears .**

**Int – Do you think people get judged a lot on how they are dressed? And does that affect you and the stores you choose to go to 4**

**R – As I said in the beginning I do tend to put some people into categories like by the way they dress. so I can tell or relate to someone by the way they look and decide if I have something in common with them , as I said before a guy wit a leather jacket..... I 'd assume that we would not have much in common , I'm not saying this because I don't like the guy it's just that I believe that I won't have anything to relate with ,**

**but I do think people get judged on how they dress , for example in Greece it doesn't happen that much but I believe here it does , not judged per se , they pay attention to what the other people or persons wear , so if you see international students from my course for example you can see the way they change their dress code form the beginning of the course to the end of the course some of them try to blend in a sense so that shows that in my opinion it really matters the way you dress for some people and that's why they change .**

**in terms of stores i think there are so many choices and different varieties of stores with different styles and some tend to get stereotyped and looked down upon like primark but it doesn't really matter to me so much . if I buy something and I think I get something that is of value to me I'm satisfied and it doesn't matter what other people think .**

**Int - Are you concerned about the opinions others have of the way you dress and which stores you go to ? 4**

**R- Although I'm aware of peoples opinions and that sort of thing . I wouldn't say it would influence me to the extent to alter the way I dress or which stores I go to . it's just that I like people to think that I look good , I want to look good for myself and others so I wouldn't wear something I don't look good in or something others would like . So I would only wear something I would like , but in general I wouldn't say I would change the way I dress or go to different stores just because of others , I wouldn't think it's cool .**

Int - What's the image of French connection?

**R – Is all saints a chain or is it just a single store ?**

Int – it is a chain.

**R – Ohhh I wasn't aware of it because I've only come across it in Nottingham so by the first looks of it , I thought it was a tiny store... but in general the big stores try to have clothes which appeal to different types of people and you can tell that the smaller stores have a more distinct kind of character they don't offer that wide range of stuff and they position their stuff way better , so I was assuming all saint wasn't a chain and that it was one store .**

**Now that you say that I think French connection is similar to Zara or something in the sense that they have stuff that appeal to different age groups and different persons , but I'm not a fan I don't think I've bought anything from there ,**

**But I've been checking it lately because they had some offers, but in general I don't think their stores really have a distinct character**

## **Transcript of Juliane**

Int - Do you like shopping?

**R- yes I do because I'm a woman , I'm the typical marketers victim , basically like you know how they are always trying to appeal to women to indulge in shopping , and I think I tend to do that if I have done a lot of work, I just tell myself ooooh lets go shopping , to treat myself a little bit , it's just nice it relaxes me it makes me really happy and nice .**

Int – What specifically indulges you to go shopping?

**R- it's basically the fact , I guess the experience, you go into the shop and then you come out with a bag and you have something new in it , it makes you just feel good.**

Int – are there any other reasons that makes you want to go shopping ?

**R – well I guess for utilitarian reasons , for instance when I feel I need something , and I have to go out and get it ,but I'd say I shop mostly when I want to treat myself . I also treat it as a social activity, sometimes I just go together with friends because they need to go somewhere , so I just accompany them and I end up buying something , and maybe when I'm in a bad mood it might just cheer me up a little bit .**

Int – ok interesting, so how often would you say you go shopping ?

**R- too often , I guess ..... twice a month , when you spend a lot buying something you don't necessarily need , so I'd say twice a month , but it depends a lot on the money .when I have more money I can also go like twice a week or so**



Int – ok, so what would be a perfect day of shopping for you ?

**R- perfect day , well the stores would need to be empty , because I hate crowded stores . umm so it would be a week day when the rest of the population is working , for me fortunately all my favourite stores are situated together so I needn't walk far , that's why I like shopping malls , it really depends on what your looking for , sometimes the high street I think can be better than a mall , but it obviously depends on the day , on a ideal shopping day I would probably be in a mall , I also like to do a little people watching in-between take a break .**

Int – what would be a not so perfect day ?

**R – Umm crowded stores and not finding something I don't like , or buying something and realising at the end of the day that you don't want it , realising that I basically wasted money**

Int – how important is self-image to you ?

**R – I guess it is quite important , I woul say I'm a little bit self critical , im trying to improve myself because of insecurities and stuff , I don't know I think every one cares about image and what others may or may not think of you , so I would say it is more or less very important .**

Int – would you say you're a positive person or negative person?

**R – well (laughs) I'm probably a negative person , I don't really have reason to but I always try to see the glass half empty and half full**

Int – so your sort of want to strive in becoming a positive person?

**R – I always try to like see the good things , I worry too much I think , where as other people are just like you know , things happen and they are fine and their like everything is alright , whereas I'm always worrying too much , but I'm trying to work on that**

Int – would you say you find yourself attractive?

**R – Ugh depends on the day, like a typical woman, sometimes I will feel I am sometimes not ,**

Int – would you say shopping and going to stores have any influence on yourself image?

**R - you know how they promote new collections coming out , say twice a year or 4 times a year , anyway you buy something new that's in fashion , and you wear it and I look really nice so I guess it does enhance myself image to an extent .**

Int – what does clothes mean to you?

**R – clothes are definitely more than just clothes , it shows who you are , it definitely reflects on your character on you personality and it is quite a self-statement , for**

**instance I consider myself who doesn't follow every fashion trend that appears and I think I reflect that in my clothing style which is very practical and stuff ,**

Int – You said that clothes are identity building and they reflect your personality, so what type of message would you want or like to send?

**R – I guess I want to send a message that others can easily get on with, not overly complicated , not a fashionista ,I don't want to be seen as a superficial Barbie ,who cares about pink clothes and glitter so I think I try to express that by the way that I dress . I am a more practical person I don't like to make a fuss about things**

Int - so you said clothes do have a personality, in a similar sense do you think stores have different personalities about them?

**R – Oh yes definitely, stores and the different brands they stand for and décor so I would definitely agree that stores do have a personality about them**

Int – what would you say about the personality of all saints?

**R – umm .. all saints is basically quite a cool shop very urban , its very characteristics of the singer sewing machines in the windows , it gives it quite a vintage flair although it is quite up to date in terms of fashion , umm I do like the wooden floors that they usually have , they have a bit of like different characteristics than other stores for example stores like zara , h & m all have that white clean sheik look , where as all saint is very individual so to say ,**

Int- you mentioned the sewing machines and the darkness about all saints which make it unique , how does that affect you ?

**R- yeah uniqueness is a massive aspect of the store and also they sort of link well with what they have on offer , because its not just a normal clothing shop , they also sell gadgets and little tiny books that say stuff about girls and boys , you know funny stuff . they have a lot of characteristics that reflect the things you buy in the store for example you get more than just a pair of jeans or coat but you get something with it , so ya its quite nice and it makes you feel quite valued .**

Int – how would you perceive the other customers of the store (all saints) ? 6,2,3, 4

**R – Hmm. I think they are lot more individualistic and maybe and they are a bit more adventurous with their fashion than I am , I like to go into the store , but I have to say I don't buy a lot of stuff in there , although I do like their clothes but they're a little too hippy for me , and for that reason I just think I am one of those people who can't wear all saints clothes , do you understand what I mean . also I think the clothes are really skinny and just made for thin people, and sometimes even the employees look weird at me , so its just one of those stores i go with my friends , I also feel the style is very English so its not really my kind of thing but who knows one day when I'm thin I**

**might just become their number 1 customer because I do really like going to the store , . I think it's coming to Germany now, it hasn't been there in the past.**

**Int – and what about the customers, you said there more?**

**R – I said there more adventurous, they have a lot of piercings and they look a lot more colourful than I am. So yea very different from me at this point of time .**

**Int – So you say you like visiting the store a lot ?**

**R – I do like the store a lot yes and the layout, however you also need to look at the price level there ,as things are fairly expensive , you think twice before you buy something .**

**Int – is there any other store besides all saints, that really appeals to you ?**

**R – I really do like French connection , I think its very exclusive , you also get a really good customer care , and but at the same time the employees are not making too much effort so you can really take your time with things also , they don't like pressure you for anything , I really like the clothes because its very much my style I would definitely go in and buy a lot of clothes from their when I have more money .**

**Int – you said they have really good customer care? Can you maybe give me an example of this ?**

**R – I think they really give good advise I think their really honest ,so for instance if you try on something and you don't look so good some people in some other stores might mention ohhh you look great you definitely need to buy it , where as at French connction they'll be really honest and suggest that maybe something else suits you better , also I hate it when going to shop and people try to pressure you going oh!! can I help you , can I help you ?? blah blah blah . like I really hate that I like to look around and stuff and they really balance it very well .showing that they are definelty their for you without pressuring you**

**Int – How were the employees at all saints like ?**

**R - don't really remember them , cause I've never really engaged with the employees there , I didn't feel really pressured , however also because the store is quite large I just didn't really see them at all , but yes I did mention to you that they look at me a little funny .,**

**Int – You said u fell really comfortable at fcuk ? Can you compare that feeling with the way you felt at all saints ?**

**R – it's completely different , all saints is very urban and quite trendy and a bit cutting edge , whereas French connection is quite clear in what the clothes it sells and the way the store is designed its very clean and neat , it would depend a lot on how you feel on a day and the people you go shopping and stuff , for example if you go with a lot of**

**British people who are used to going to these kinds of stores you feel more comfortable , but if I go alone I always prefer French connection .**

Int – ok so why would you feel more comfortable with your British friends at all saints than not with them?

**R – because you can talk about the things you see, something's I think are really trendy and some are really ridiculous , no one would ever where them according to my point of view , the gadgets and books are quite nice to talk about with friends , I think the little subtleties they ad to the store make it really interesting shopping there ,**

Int – you said French connection is your style , could you just let me know what exactly your style is ?

**R – my style .. well that's really hard to explain . let me think for just a second , I guess its quite classy and perhaps practical , I guess classy might be the right word , so they will have relatively simple ways of tailoring , their jumpers and trousers they will look really good . I like basic colours , and I just enhance it with some accessories . that probably is a reason why I love French connection so much because its very similar to my sense of style and who I am as a person .**

Int- what about the other customers of the store would you say they are similar to you ? 7,2,3

**R – IO don't like to go in their , but I think I don't quite belong their but in sales its different and the people who usually are there are business women who have a good income and can afford to go there .**

Int – why do you say that you don't feel like you belong there?

**R – well mostly because it's a little bit above from what I I can afford being a student , but ... when I start working I could see myself being one of their loyal customers .**

Int –are you different from say 4 or 5 years ago ?

**R – obviously , the way I evolve in the same way my dress sense has evolved .**

Int – if you had to describe fcuk t another person , how would you describe it ? 3,7

**R- Very clasy , very modern and beautiful .**

Int – are trends important to you ?

**R – is what important to you ?**

Int – trends ?

**R – umm to a certain extent , I really like to follow fashion , I like following fashion magazine and being aware of what does come into the stores , , but I make my own judgement for example even if something is trendy I'm not convinced that I can wear it , sometimes I just don't do it on purpose , for example if everyone is wearing it I make a conscious effort not to wear the same clothes as a counter movement , and that may loose every sense of individuality you have .**

Int –What about people? Do you observe them ?

**R – oh yea I always pay attention to them , I may ask them where they buy some of their clothes from or I will buy it together with them.**

Int – do you think people are judged on the clothes they purchase?

**R – Yes they do , I do it also , im not sure if its consciously or sub consciously**

Int – so would you be conscious about it ?

**R -yea I am , sometimes quite conscious about it how people dress makes my initial judgement .**

Int - do you conform or try to create you identity ?

**R – well I do a bit of both , it's a mix between a bit of individuality and a little bit of fashion , although I 'm aware of some ppl who are more individualistic than me , but I try to keep a balance**

Int – would you say your individualism has increased as you've gotten older?

**R – as a person yeah definitely, there's nothing more important than following the crowd when ur younger , u rly try to make it happen , the older you get the more mature you get you really try not to get too bothered about what people think and the less attention you pay to what they wear and which stores they go to .**

